

DEVELOPING A MODEL FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP RETENTION
THROUGH ASSIMILATION, RECLAMATION,
AND ACTIVATION MINISTRY

Marvin L. Miller, Sr., D.Min.

B. A., The Ohio State University, 1975
M.S.A., Central Michigan University, 1986

Mentor

Ricky Woods, D.Min.
Terry Thomas, D.Min.

A FINAL DOCUMENT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
DAYTON, OHIO
December, 2003

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
DEDICATION	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter	
1. MINISTRY FOCUS	4
2. STATE OF THE ART IN MINISTRY MODEL	20
3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION	25
4. METHODOLOGY	59
5. FIELD EXPERIENCE	62
6. REFLECTIONS, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	72
Appendix	
A. PRETEST SURVEY RESULTS	75
B. TRAINING WORKSHOP	97
C. POSTTEST SURVEY RESULTS	108
D. SERMON SERIES	130
E. SERMON SERIES QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS	162
BIBLIOGRAPHY	174

ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A MODEL FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP RETENTION THROUGH ASSIMILATION, RECLAMATION, AND ACTIVATION MINISTRY

by

Marvin L. Miller, Sr.

United Theological Seminary, 2003

Mentor

Ricky Woods, D.Min.

Terry Thomas, D.Min.

This project addresses the problem of the “swinging door,” where some church members leave the church soon after they have joined. The context is the Greater Vision Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio. The hypothesis was that once the church became aware of this problem, it would participate in actions that would help to assimilate, reclaim and activate straying church members. Methodologies that were used for this project included pre/posttest analysis, sermons, and workshops. Success of the project was assessed by the changes in attitudes and awareness among the selected test group concerning the “swinging door problem.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to so many people who have invested their time and efforts and prayers in the completion of this project. I am especially thankful for my wife, Grace Miller, who helped me in so many ways to complete this project. Grace assisted me in the development of the data analysis and the graphs, which are reflected in the appendix of this project. More importantly, she served as my confidant, editor and supporter. Her loving and kind words have helped me to continue on during times that I needed encouragement most.

I am also indebted to my mentors, Drs. Ricky Woods and Terry Thomas, who provided wisdom, guidance, and instruction that helped me to fine-tune this project. May God bless them for the tireless work they have done. Also, thanks go to Dr. Clinton McNair who serves as Dean of the D.Min Program at United Theological Seminary.

A special thanks goes to Mrs. Lee Smith, my context associate, who provided tremendous assistance in the development of the research design in this project. In addition, she has helped to arrange meetings and aided me in the evaluation of various questionnaires. I am continually grateful to my pastor, the Rev. Odell Waller of Tabernacle Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio. I also would like to thank my professional associates Drs. Daryl Hairston, Keith Troy and Jesse Wood. I am also grateful to Rev. Harold Hudson who served as my peer associate and prayer partner.

Finally, special thanks to the Greater Vision Missionary Baptist Church Family who supported this effort spiritually, financially, and prayerfully. I appreciate your

willingness to be used as the context of this project and your dedication to your Lord,
pastor, church and community at large. I thank God for such a wonderful church family.

DEDICATION

This project is first dedicated to my wife of thirty-one years, Lady Grace Miller, as well as to my three children, Sharonda, Marvin, Jr., and Nyisha, and grandson, Cornelius.

The project is also dedicated to the memory of those that gave me love and life, my now deceased parents, JC and Mary Frances Miller. With very few financial and educational resources, my parents served as wonderful examples as they reared their eight children; Annettia, Richard (now deceased), Marvin, Brenda, Mary, Pamela, Patricia (now deceased) and Pannell.

The project is also dedicated to the many people, including all relatives, friends, pastors, ministers, church members, and teachers that have had a major influence in my personal, educational and spiritual development. I realize that the only reason why I am able to reach to a higher height today is because I am standing on the foundation that has been built by many others that have passed my way.

Most important, I dedicate this project to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who has saved my soul and endowed me with the strength, motivation and perseverance to complete this awesome task. "To God Be The Glory For The Things He Has Done!"

INTRODUCTION

This doctoral project was designed to address what can be done to help retain church members, or, more specifically, to slow down what is called the “swinging door problem,” where members swing out of the church’s back door as quickly as they have entered the front door.

The relevance of this project arises out of the issue of the need for an effective church membership retention ministry within the context, which is the Greater Vision Missionary Baptist Church, located in Columbus, Ohio. The main goal was to develop a model that could help church leaders and members to become more astute about the “swinging door problem.” By doing so, it was believed that the church within the context would become more effective in assimilating, reclaiming and activating its members and, as a result, church membership retention would be augmented and the “swinging door problem” would be diminished.

The model in ministry was designed in five phases. The first phase consisted of a pretest survey, which examined the selected test group’s knowledge and attitudes about terms associated with church membership retention.

The second phase consisted of a training workshop, which was given to the selected test group. This training was conducted to acquaint the test group members with specific knowledge and terms associated with church membership retention.

The third phase consisted of a posttest survey. The posttest survey was given after the completion of the training workshop. Because one of the major objectives of the

pretest survey was to measure attitudinal changes, posttest survey questions were the same as pretest survey questions. Thus, the purpose of this testing was to assess any changed attitudes between the pretest and posttest results.

The fourth phase of the methodology for the model in ministry was a preaching series, which included sermons that focused on the subject matter, “How to Keep the Sheep.” It was the researcher’s belief that preaching was the important issue in church membership retention for the Greater Vision Missionary Baptist Church. It was the purpose of the preaching series to prepare the congregation for what it takes to help assimilate, re-acclimate and activate church members into the body of Christ.

Because the sermon, which is the word of God, is often the most valid reason that many church members cleave to, this series attempted to present theological themes that informed the members of the meaning of being a caring and loving community of baptized believers in Jesus Christ. These sermons were given for the purpose of educating and preparing the congregation for outreach ministry relating to the assimilation, reclamation and activation of straying and inactive church members. In addition, the sermons presented church members with biblical theology that was intended to make them more sensitive, loving and caring of fellow members of the body of Christ. Finally, the sermons sought to expose issues which could possibly lead members of the congregation to further explore this issue and to relate it to their own personal Christian witness.

A total of four sermons were preached as a means for preparing the congregation for this model in ministry. Those sermons served to raise the consciousness of members of the congregation to the “swinging door problem” which existed in the context church.

The fifth phase of this model in ministry was the administration of a preaching questionnaire to measure the impact of the preaching series. A Likert Scale was also used to measure attitudes, which was desired by the researcher.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One defines the ministry focus, which addresses issues as they relate to the “swinging door problem” that exists within churches.

Chapter Two reviews resources by others that have given insight, understanding and clarity to this project.

Chapter Three reflects the theoretical foundation for this model in ministry. It provides the historical, biblical and theological basis of this project.

Chapter Four records the methodology for the implementation of this model in ministry. It highlights the questionnaires, workshops, surveys, and sermons and their effectiveness.

Chapter Five records the results of study that was done in the field relating to this model in ministry. It includes the results and the impact it had on the context. The hypothesis tested in the study and the test instruments used are defined. The statistical data differences between the pretest, surveys and the transformational mind – set of the context are also included.

Chapter Six contains reflections, summations and conclusions. It addresses what was learned, whether the goals for this project were met, and the final analysis of whether the project was successful.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The basis for this ministry model is to examine how to retain church members who come in through the church's "front door," but soon become inactive or exit through the "swinging door." This project's focus is on how to assimilate, acclimate and activate church members into the body of Christ in order to carry out the five-fold ministry of the church which includes: worship, evangelism, fellowship, discipleship and hands-on ministry.

Throughout the country and the world, there is an interest among churches concerning how to increase the number of persons attending and/or becoming part of church membership. Primarily, the method used to increase membership has been the vehicle of evangelism or, simply put, spreading the "good news" of Jesus Christ to all who will hear it. The biblical precedent for doing this can be found in the 28th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, which tells us, "Go ye therefore and preach to all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost." So, in response to this "Great Commission," the church, through its members and clergy, has won many persons to Christ and, therefore, has increased the number of congregational members by the preaching and teaching of this "Good News Gospel." Church membership, or the number of people that a church has on its church roll, however, is not always a measure of the success of a church in carrying out the "Great Commission." Not only does the "Great

Commission” command us to teach and to preach, but it also commands us to fellowship (baptizing them in the name of the Father Son and Holy Ghost), in other words, to make those who join our churches feel part of the body of Christ.

The particular context of this project is the Greater Vision Missionary Baptist Church, located in Columbus, Ohio. The Church was officially organized on July 9, 1994 with Marvin L. Miller, Sr., as its founding pastor. Although the church was organized with 17 charter members, it was not long before its membership began to grow rapidly. Initially, church members worshipped at a chapel located in a Senior Citizens Complex with 30 chairs set up to receive visitors. Within the first full year, seventy-five people had joined the fellowship and, by the time it celebrated its third anniversary, membership had grown to two hundred.

As the church celebrated the third Church Anniversary, members of the Greater Vision MBC family marched into a newly purchased edifice on July 9, 1997. As stated before, the church continued to grow. By January 1, 2002, over 300 people had become members of the church. The weekly attendance at the church, however, was not representative of the growth that the church experienced through the years. In fact, on a weekly basis, the average attendance is one hundred and seventy-five people. This seems to indicate that, in spite of the tremendous growth that the church experienced, it has failed to keep and/or assimilate many of the members who have joined. This is alarming for it seems that the church has “a swinging door problem.” As some people are swinging into our church, others are swinging out of the church.

Thus, the intent of this paper is to document research that has been done in the examination of this problem relating to church membership retention by Assimilation, Reclamation, and Activation efforts. It is hoped that this research will help in the

evaluation of the “swinging door problem” and also in the development of a relevant and effective model that can help to solve or lessen the problem as it relates to absent and inactive church members. In addition, it is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will be in the midst of the researched material, as well as the researcher, so that the will of Almighty God will be done in the lives of the context church.

My Spiritual Journey

I was born June 24, 1951 to J. C. and Mary Miller. Often I say jokingly, “I was destined to be saved because my Dad’s name was J. C., my mother’s name was Mary, and my wife’s name is Grace.”

I was the third of eight children. In addition, my two cousins came to live with us for a time after their mother died. This was a tight squeeze for all of us—twelve people living in an old, run-down three-bedroom house. This arrangement taught me at an early age the importance of cooperation and teamwork and it bonded us together as a family (even though, at times, we really got on each other’s nerves).

We were reared in a very religious home. Mom was a devout Christian, as well as a great mother and friend. It was my mother who first introduced us to Jesus and encouraged us to accept Him as our personal Savior. She would insist that we attend Sunday services, church school, and bible study. She also made us participate in other church and religious activities. Mom would often say that, of all the prayers she prayed, the two she wanted answered most was for her family to be saved and for all of her children to get a decent education. She dedicated her life to serving the Lord and taking care of her family. In addition, even though she didn’t realize it, Mom was both a preacher and philosopher. She spent much of her time teaching and preaching to us about the Lord

and quoting things like “be what you are and not what you aren’t, because if you be what your aren’t, you are not what you are” or “if at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.”

Mom died at age 54 while attending Communion Service at the Tabernacle Baptist Church. My mother was the most influential person in my early life. Her death was, by far, the saddest thing that I have thus far experienced in life.

My father was not as religious as mom; he did not attend church as often as the rest of our family. Nonetheless, like mom, he was a very kind person who lived a clean life and set a good example for his children. Dad believed in living a morally clean life. This was demonstrated more by his deeds more than his words. Dad did not use foul language, smoke, drink liquor, or gamble. Neither was he ever abusive to his children or my mother. Both he and mom had a great sense of humor, although Dad’s personality was more introverted than mom’s. As a young child, I sometimes found it difficult to get Dad to express his thoughts because he generally kept his personal thoughts and opinions to himself. However, as I became older, he opened the channels of communication and began to share his views of religion, family and politics with me. For this reason, I bonded with Dad during my late teen and early young adult years.

At age 64, my father learned that he had cancer. He died at age 65. It was during his bout with cancer that I learned most about my father and his values, morals and religious belief. Dad expressed that he was grateful for the many years that the Lord had allowed him and informed me that Jesus Christ was his Lord and Savior. After his death, I became very depressed and sad, but as time went on I thanked God for allowing me to get to know my father and for the precious moments we shared during the last years of his life.

I attended Pilgrim Elementary School where most of the teachers were Black and Christians. The teachers held all students to high standards at Pilgrim. Not only did they expect you to learn Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, but each student was also taught to recite the Lord's Prayer, The Creation by James Weldon Johnson, and the Ten Commandments. We were also instructed to always give honor and respect to God, those in authority, and to our elders. So, in addition to providing us with the basics of education, my teachers enhanced and reinforced the values, morals and attitudes that I learned at home and church. Because the teachers and school officials took such an interest in me, I was very motivated to learn and I tried to be on my best behavior at all times at home, church, school and in our community.

During the second half of my sixth grade school year, The Ohio Board of Education gave all sixth graders a so-called "intelligence exam." This exam, which was supposed to measure intellect, instead measured the students' exposure to specific items and situations. For example, it would ask questions like "what is a chandelier?" or "if a kid hits you on the playground, what should you do?" Those students who did well on the exam were placed in the top seventh grade classes the following year. The students who did not do well on the exam were placed in the lower seventh grade classes. As a result, I ended up in a seventh grade class where the students (all black boys) were labeled as "future juvenile delinquents." On the first day of class, the teacher told us "you are all in this class because the results of your tests indicate that you are not cultured and that you all will end up as juvenile delinquents, if you don't learn the ways of the dominant culture." This was in direct contrast with the image that I had of myself and I was insulted that anyone would actually try to label me "Juvenile Delinquent" because of one unfair exam.

Unlike some of my classmates who allowed this experience to define who they were, I became even more motivated so that I could prove these statistics wrong. By the end of the year, with much help from my parents, church leaders and two black, Christian male school teachers, I proved that the results of the exam were wrong when I was taken out of that class and placed into a high achievement class in the eighth grade. Looking back, I understand that this motivation came about because of the strong background from which I came, a background that reminded me that “I could do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Economically speaking, our family was very poor. Dad, who only finished the tenth grade, worked at various jobs including railroad helper, laborer, construction worker, post office worker and taxi cab driver. Mom, who received her high school diploma at night school after her family moved to Ohio from Florida, often assisted with expenses by doing outside domestic work, ironing and nursing assistant activities. In spite of their efforts to make ends meet, our family’s economic level remained below poverty level. As a result, in order to get enough food to feed our family, we went to the State fairground monthly to get government subsidy food. The food included powdered milk, powdered eggs, canned Spam, beef, bulk cheese, and dried rice. We also received free clothing from the “Charity Newsies,” an organization that gave new clothing to needy children each school year. I always felt ashamed going to the fairground for food and to the Charity Newsies for clothes and I vowed, at an early age, that when I become grown I would never live in poverty again, even if I had to work multiple jobs at once. Although my mother would always remind me that we were only poor in material things, not in spiritual things, it was still very embarrassing to be poor. My feelings were especially hurt when our neighbors would laugh and poke fun at us when our electricity, gas, or water

was turned off because we were not able to pay the bills. As I look back, I now understand how the Lord made a way out of no way when he clothed and fed us when we could not clothe and feed ourselves. I also learned the value of hard work. In fact, to this day, most of my adult life I have worked two full-time jobs just as I had vowed I would as a child.

For most of my childhood life I lived on the short East Side (the so-called hood) in Columbus Ohio, between Mt. Vernon Ave. and Long Street. In those days, this part of town was considered to be "Action City." Thus, it was very common to see an array of lifestyles and careers in that area. There were pimps, hustlers, street preachers, priests and black Muslims. There were pawnshop owners who bought low and sold high, and nightclub owners who provided weekly entertainment to the neighborhood by people like B. B. King, Ben E. King, Peg Leg Marcum, Nancy Wilson and popular singing groups. One of the highlights of the neighborhood was the yearly parade that brought the one and only "Sweet Daddy Grace" to town. Sweet Daddy was the charismatic founder of the United House of Prayer for All People. His claim to fame was that he was the reincarnation of Jesus Christ. Although the masses of people seemed to praise him as he was carried on a cot during the parade, I knew even then that he was a false prophet and con artist.

Growing up in such an environment challenged me to think of what was my purpose in life. Many of my friends and relatives chose the way of the hood. Some became pimps, prostitutes, slicks and even con artists. Because of my conceptual framework, which consisted of my Christian upbringing and moral standards that I learned at home and at church, I was led by the Holy Spirit to confess Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior at the age of twelve. On the evening of that same day, I heard the Lord calling me to

preach His Word. I never wanted to preach. As a matter of fact, it took all that I had to join the church in the first place. I wanted to one day make some money to stay out of poverty. So, instead of acknowledging my call to preach the gospel, I ran from it and turned my attention to possible future careers that would lead to fame, fortune and big paychecks one day.

As mom had prayed, the Lord allowed all of her children to get a good education, including myself. I received my high school diploma from Columbus East High School, obtained my Bachelor's from The Ohio State University and Masters from Central Michigan University. Just as I had envisioned as a child, my education opened up doors for me. I was blessed to be hired at jobs that paid well and also gave me authority. I held positions such as Community Center Director, Insurance Underwriter, Assistant Human Resources Director, Employee Development Specialist, and Adjunct Instructor and State Director of the Ohio Jobs Student Retention Program, a position in which I had oversight of programs at thirty-three community colleges throughout the State of Ohio. By then, at age thirty-seven, I was married to my lovely, Christian wife, Grace, and we were blessed to have three wonderful children. We were living in a very nice neighborhood. We were active in church activities, but most of all, we were making good money, which I had always dreamed of doing when I was a poor child in the hood. Nevertheless, in spite of all that I had and all that I had done, I was miserable. Throughout all those years, I knew that the Lord had called me to preach and that I had intentionally ignored this calling while attempting to fulfill my personal wants and needs.

One night, after every one else had gone to bed at our house, I was at my kitchen table drinking a cup of coffee and reading my bible when I heard, in the background, a song on the radio that would challenge me to accept my call to preach. The artist singing

the song was Janet Jackson. The song was “What Have You Done For Me Lately.” For some reason the song seemed to convict me, so I turned the radio off and went back to the kitchen table. As I sat down, I felt that God was saying to me, as clear as day, “Marvin, that’s a serious question. That’s the question of which I’ve been asking you for years. What have you done for me lately? I called you at age 12 you ignored me. What have you done for me lately? I’ve allowed you to fulfill your dream of getting out of poverty. I’ve blessed you to get a good education and to become employed at some great places where you had responsibility and authority. Now, what have you done for me lately?” I said, “what do you want from me now? He answered, “the same thing that I wanted when you were 12 years old; I want you to preach my word.” At that point, the tears flowed from my cheeks into my coffee cup as I said, “Okay Lord.” Yet, in my ignorance I added “but you are going to have to keep me busy.” Immediately after this, I ran up to my bedroom and woke up my wife, Grace, and said, “I’ve accepted my call from the Lord to be a preacher.” With a groggy voice she said to me “but I don’t want to be a preacher’s wife.”

After I finally yielded to God, I informed my pastor that I had accepted my call to preach the gospel. From previous discussions, he knew about my struggle with accepting this call. In addition, he was also familiar with my work in the church. For eighteen years I had been a member of this church and had served the church in various capacities including Sunday school instructor, musician, choir president, and youth leader. After a few months of preparation, I gave my “Trial Sermon” on November 5, 1989. Just as I had asked God when I accepted my calling, my ministry schedule from the start was very active and busy. A few months after I was licensed to preach, my pastor became very ill. So, with his approval, the church asked me, along with another associate minister, if we would preach on alternating Sundays until our pastor returned. I agreed to this preaching

schedule and was blessed with the opportunity to study and prepare sermons at this early stage in my ministry. During this period, church membership increased drastically, not because we preached so well, but because the Lord used both of us ministers to attract other youth to our middle-aged/senior citizen congregation. This alternating preaching schedule went on for over a full year and later, after our pastor died, I was asked to serve as interim pastor until the church could find a pastor. Even though I was allowed to candidate for the vacancy also, my family and I soon left this church as the congregation and church officials began to argue and disagree concerning the direction the church should go in choosing a pastor.

Having left the church where I had been a member for so long, my family and I joined another local church, which had just chosen a new pastor. The pastor was very young, educated and inexperienced, but he seemed to have been anointed by God to lead that particular church. I joined the church because I felt I could serve the church and pastor with my gifts of teaching, music and preaching. In addition, my wife and children and I felt the love of Christ from church members and we liked the church's education and missionary programs, as well as their worship style. So we all joined and became very involved at our new church home.

Not long after we joined our new church, the pastor, who said that he saw great potential in my ministry, assigned me to serve as praise leader, Sunday school teacher, and to oversee the Christian Education Ministry. I served in these positions faithfully for two years. I also was given opportunity to preach from time to time at our church and continued to receive many invitations to preach at other churches throughout the city. In fact, I was being approached and encouraged by several outside church officials to candidate for pulpit vacancies at their churches. As my preaching invitations became more

and more prevalent and my popularity began to grow, my pastor seemed to become distant to me. I believe that this new attitude was brought about because he was experiencing difficulty with members and officials of the church. Obviously, he must have felt that if I were chosen as pastor at some other church, some disenchanted members would change their membership to the church where I would be pastor.

Although I tried to do everything I could to show my loyalty to God, our church and my pastor, one day he called me and said that he knew that I was trying to steal his members and asked me to leave the church. After much discussion with him, being hurt and confused, my family and I left this wonderful, loving church, mainly because I felt the pastor was God's "anointed one" and I did not want to battle with the man whom God placed at the helm of that church.

While searching for a new church home, I was informed that one of our local senior citizen centers had a very nice chapel, which was not being used. I called the manager and she informed me that she was in search of a minister who could conduct services for a few elderly people on Sunday mornings. I agreed to conduct services as long as others could also attend. At first she was reluctant and limited the outside number to ten visitors. So we began to have services with about 20 people a month for three months. On July 9, 1994 a formal church was organized with 17 official members, the church elected me as pastor. Our church, named the Greater Vision Missionary Baptist Church, worshipped at the Bryden House Senior Citizen Center for three years. During that time, the church membership grew to 100 people. On our third Church and Pastor Anniversary, we purchased a beautiful, three-story, church edifice (by this time our church membership had increased to about 200 people). Just recently, we celebrated our ninth Church and

Pastor Anniversary and, while our church rostrum lists over 400 members, it's safe to say that we have close to 300 active church members today.

I thank God for seeing me through my spiritual journey. I ask for His continued divine guidance as we at Greater Vision commit ourselves to carry out the church's mission which is to worship our Lord, spread His word, fellowship with the saints, make disciples through effective teaching, and roll up our sleeves and minister to human needs.

Contextual Analysis

The context of this ministry will be reviewed in three parts. These include historical information as it relates to Columbus, Ohio, the near east side community, and the Greater Vision Missionary Baptist Church. The primary focus will be to give an overview of each of these entities as it relates to population, education, employment and other related data. In addition, more specific information will be given pertaining to the formation, mission and congregational make-up of the Greater Vision Missionary Baptist Church.

Part One – Columbus, Ohio

Columbus is the largest city in Ohio and also the capital of the state and seat of Franklin County. While most of Ohio's major urban centers were decreasing in population in the 1980's and 1990's, Columbus was rapidly growing, in part because of its healthy mixed economy.

While Columbus has many employers, it is basically a Service and Business Industry city and is distinguished by its concentration of businesses engaged in information processing. Among the top five employers in the city are Communication/ Utilities, 28%;

Retail/Finance/Insurance/Real Estate, 19.3%; Educational Services, 9.4%' and Other Professional Services, 7.8%. The public sector employs 6.3% of the population.

Columbus is located near the center of Ohio between the Scioto and Olentangy Rivers. It lies on the rolling Central Lowland of the eastern Midwest. The city was named in honor on Christopher Columbus at the time state legislators voted to create the city as the state capital.

According to the 2000 Census, Columbus population is 711,470 making it the 15th largest city in the nation. The population grew 12.4% since 1990; about 80% of the population growth occurred in the area annexed before 1990. The population growth rate between 1970 and 2000 is 31.8%. Columbus has had continued growth since 1955.

Columbus is a center for education with numerous colleges and universities. The Ohio State University (OSU) has the greatest influence as it relates to education in the city of Columbus. The city also is host to Franklin and Capital Universities, as well as Ohio Dominican College, Columbus State Community College, the Columbus College of Art and Design, the Pontifical College Josephinum, and Devry Institute of Technology.

Prominent among cultural institutions in Columbus are the Ohio Historical Center, The Wexner Center for the Arts, The Ohio State University School of Architecture, the Columbus Museum of Art, the Center of Science and Industry, the Columbus Zoo, and the Franklin Park Conservatory. The city, which supports recreation and sports activities enthusiastically, is home to the OSU Buckeyes Football Team, the Columbus Crew Soccer Team, the Columbus Blue Jackets National Hockey Team, and the Columbus Clippers Minor League Baseball Team.

Columbus' racial population composition consists of 67.9% White, 26% Black, 3.9% Asian, 2.5% Hispanics, and 1.9% other. The majority of the population (19.6%) is

between the ages of 25 and 34. The median age is 30.6. This means that half of the population is above 30.6 and half is below this age. The elderly (65 and older) make up 8.9%. Sixty-one percent of the elderly population is female.

There are 301,534 households in Columbus. This is up 17.3% from the 1990 Census. Family households make up 54.8% of all households in 2000. Family households with children decreased significantly from 1990 to 2000. Non-family households increased by 27.8%. Three percent of the population lives in households as unmarried partners.

Part Two – The Near East Side Community

The Near East Community, where the Greater Vision Missionary Baptist Church is located, is on the East Side just two miles west of Downtown in Columbus, Ohio.

According to the 2000 Census, the community has a population of 22,607 and there are 11,519 housing units and 8,466 households located in the Near East Side Community. The median household income is \$16,390 and the average household income is \$23,247.

The racial breakdown of the Near East Community is 13.6% White, 81.5% Black, 0.4% Native American, 0.66% Asian, 0.1% Hawaiian Islander, 0.6% other, and 3.3% and 1.3% Hispanic. From 1990 to 2000 the population decreased on the Near East Side. The recent census lists the population shift as -2,312.

Of all persons over the age of 25 years old (14,176) that reside on the Near East, educational attainment is as follows: 9th grade education, 12.9%; some high school education, 29.30%; high school graduates, 28%; some college education, 16.3%; Associate Degrees, 4.2%; Bachelor's Degrees, 5.6%; and Graduate Degree, 3.0%.

Part Three – Greater Vision Missionary Baptist Church

On April 17, 1994 a fellowship of baptized believers in Christ began having weekly services at the Bryden House Chapel, located at 1555 Bryden Road, on the near east side of Columbus, Ohio. Each week, Rev. Marvin L. Miller, Sr. brought the morning message, as his family, the Miller Singers, provided inspirational musical selections for these services. After a few weeks of gathering, it became obvious that God was leading this fellowship, which had unofficially begun calling themselves the “No Name Church,” to organize a formal church. As a direct result, the fellowship met at the home of Rev. Miller for the purpose of church organization on July 9, 1994.

Under the moderation of Brother James Carpenter, 17 fellowship members voted unanimously to organize a church and become chartered members of the church. Now that the church was organized, it was decided by majority vote that the church name would be Greater Vision Missionary Baptist Church and the church members elected officers and unanimously voted that Rev. Marvin L. Miller, Sr. would be the church’s founding/organizing pastor.

With God’s blessing, the Greater Vision Missionary Baptist Church has served our community and the Greater Columbus area in five particular areas of church work. These include: worship, fellowship, evangelism, discipleship and ministering to human needs. The fruit of the church’s labor has been seen through providing assistance to the sick and needy, serving at homeless shelters where needed, teaching and preaching classes and seminars, assisting members and others socially, financially and spiritually.

Since its inception, Greater Vision has taken in over 350 members. There are still 250 active members today. Of the current active members, 16% are between ages 5-12,

12% between ages 12-18, 16% between ages 19-30, 48% between ages 31-60 and 8% are over the age of 60.

The church offers a variety of ministries to members and to the community. Greater Vision ministries include Trustee/Finance, Men's Fellowship and Mission, Nurses Corp, Usher Board, Women's Fellowship and Mission, Youth Fellowship and Mission, Deacons and Deaconesses, Dance, Adult Choir, Children's Choir, Men's Choir, Praise Team, Library, After School, Food Pantry, Sunday School, Bible Study, Prayer Meeting, Leadership, Laymen's, Outreach and Preacher's ministries.

Geographically, the members of Greater Vision live in various areas of Columbus, Ohio. Members who live on the East Side of the city are 48%; North Side 34%; South Side 10.4%, and West Side 7.6%. All Greater Vision members are of the African American race. The average income of church members is \$20,000 per year.

Throughout the history of the Greater Vision Missionary Baptist Church, the church membership has grown rapidly; however, many members have seemed to leave the church as fast as they came. This has left the church with a portion of “now you see me, now you don't church members.” As a result, we must examine this “swinging door membership” mentality in order to assess how we can assimilate, acclimate and retain those who become members at Greater Vision.

CHAPTER TWO

STATE OF THE ART IN MINISTRY MODEL

The purpose of this chapter is to provide to the reader a narrative of the literature related to this mode in ministry. This analysis will confine itself to literature relating to church membership decline as well as “the swinging door problem” that exists within some churches.

The first article that was examined was written by Flavil R. Yeakley who conducted research into how to incorporate new church members while at the same time developing successful approaches to bring about workable strategies for keeping current church members active and involved. To Yeakley, these concerns were of viable interest when considering how to deal with the “swinging door problem.” In his writing he stated:

The varieties of elements, which contribute to a successful incorporation strategy, take such study and consideration. Yet, the dual tasks of creating sufficient roles for a growing membership and then communicating those opportunities for involvement are certainly two important ingredients of a successful incorporation.¹

While conducting his research, Yeakley analyzed 48 congregations. These congregations were selected on the basis of their net growth rate. Net growth rate was defined as the adult conversion rate minus the dropout of these converts. Sixteen of the subject churches were in the top 20 percent net growth of a nationwide sample of

¹ Flavil R. Yeakley, “Growth and Assimilation,” *Church Growth: America* 7 (March-April, 1981): 17-18.

congregations from selected denominations. Sixteen churches were in the middle 20 percent net growth, and sixteen were in the bottom 20 percent.

Yeakley's research proved very helpful to this writer because it examined how churches in the various net growth rate groups compared in their involvement level of members. As a result, each church's involvement level was measured and scored using the following measures:

- (1) the average percentage of members in attendance at regularly scheduled services of the congregation
- (2) the percentage of members having a leadership role in the congregation;
- (3) the percentage of members having a specific work role, or task assignment
- (4) Contribution per member per week.

This study was also helpful because it took into consideration other things, such as: size as a factor in membership involvement, the ratio of roles to members, and the perceived role to-member ratio.

A second literary work which was examined is entitled, *Church and Denominational Growth: What Does (or Does Not) Cause Growth or Decline*.² In an attempt to determine the cause of church growth and decline, the authors, Roozen and Hadaway, gathered essays to assess the current scholarship about denominational growth and decline in North America. In addition, they critically evaluated the assumptions of earlier explanations about "mainline demise" and church membership decline. The articles presented have been especially helpful to this researcher, as they have presented viable

² David A. Roozen and Kirk C. Hadaway, *What Does Or Does Not Cause Church Growth* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 400.

information through statistical data and charts concerning African American, Canadian, and Roman Catholic congregations.

The third reference was called *Finding Them, Keeping Them: Effective Strategies for Evangelism and Assimilation in the Local Church*.³ This book was written to provide answers to the questions surrounding effective evangelism and assimilation within the local church. The authors informed the readers that many well-intended pastors have watched helplessly as their congregations slip into a numbing state of stagnation that appears to be unrecoverable. They identify this stagnation as coming from two points within the local church: the front door and the back door. The authors assert that churches experience growth because they have a big front door and a tiny back door. They also note that to succeed in making these doors larger and smaller respectively, each church must focus on strategies that will help their ministry environment. This concentration on the development of targeted evangelism and assimilation strategies is central to the thesis of this book. This book was helpful, as it discussed various strategies that might be helpful in slowing down the “swinging door problem.”

In the fourth resource, “100% Convert Retention Action Guide,” David Stewart created an action guide to assist in the implementation of effective member missing efforts. By using this guide, one-year retention of a new convert rose to 100% in areas where these principles were implemented. Stewart relays, “We speak of great future harvest,

³ Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin, *Finding Them Keeping Them: Effective Strategies for Evangelism and Assimilation in the Local Church* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1992).

when the all too frequent reality of the present is that the considerable majority of the modest members who are baptized . . .”⁴

The fifth book reference is *Christian Caregiving* by Kenneth Haugh. The author of this book gives a threefold approach to caring for church members. They are Prevention, Ministry, and Welcoming Home. The resources used to accomplish these three are planning, publicizing and conducting courses.⁵

Congregational Mega, by Jeff Woods presents help to pastors and laity as it relates to changes transpiring in old and new congregations for the future.⁶ The author takes a look at seven mega trends in congregations that are redefining the way churches do evangelism, discipleship, and ministry.

Thom S. Rainer’s, *The Book of Church Growth* examines the importance and connection between assimilation, and reclamation as it relates to church growth and membership retention. Rainer examines what can be done to regain the spirit of the early church where Christians devoted themselves to the fellowship.⁷

Another book that served to remind all Christians that they are called to belong, not just to believe, is *The Purpose Driven Church*. The writer of this very informative

⁴ David Stewart, “100% Convert Retention Action Guide”; Available at <http://www.cumorah.com/retention.htm>; Internet.

⁵ Kenneth Haugh, *Christian Caregiving* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 1998), 133.

⁶ Jeff Woods, *Congregational Mega* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1996), 1.

⁷ Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History Theology and Principles* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1993), 28.

book, Rick Warren, reminds the readers that Christians are not meant to live lone lives because every Christian belongs to Christ, and they are members of the body of Christ.⁸

⁸ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995).

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide historical, biblical and theological foundations for the support of dealing with the “swinging door problem.” It is the contention of this writer that many local churches lose church members because they are unaware of how to assimilate, reclaim and activate some of those members to avoid the “swinging door problem.” To clarify these terms, the following definitions are given. “Assimilate” means to bring together. “Reclaim” means to bring back that which is lost. “Activate” means to make active. The “swinging door problem” refers to situations where church members who join through the church front door, leave or “swing out” of the back door not long after they have joined the local congregation.

In addition, this paper will document research that has been done relating to the “swinging door problem.” It is the researcher’s goal that the researched data will lead to information to help churches become more aware of the problem so that they can effectively help to retain members through assimilation, reclaiming and activation efforts. It is hoped that this research will help to development a relevant and effective model that can help to solve or lessen the problem as it relates to absent and inactive church members. We also pray that the Holy Spirit will serve to guide the context church, as well as others who read this paper to do God’s will as it relates to the “swinging door problem.”

Historical Foundation

We further engage to watch over, to pray for, to exhort and stir up each other unto every good word and work; to guard each other's reputation, not needlessly exposing the infirmities of others; to participate in each other's joy's, and with tender sympathy bear one another's burdens and sorrows; to cultivate Christian courtesy; to be slow to give or take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, being mindful of the rules of the Savior in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, to secure it without delay; and throughout life, amid evil report, and good report, to seek to live to the glory of God, who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.¹

The preceding words, which are found immediately after the publisher's note in the New Baptist Hymnal, are a part of the Baptist Church Covenant. This document is typical of many other such articles found in other Christian churches and denominations within the body of Christ. While the language of Christian Church Covenants and creeds may be different, one thing that they have in common is a commitment to watch over and care for other Christians and members of their local church congregations. This commitment does not only apply to church members who are active and serve as an intricate part of the local church, but it also applies to those straying, inactive and former members of local church congregations. These are the members who have fallen prey to what is known as "the swinging door problem," meaning they have "swung out" of the churches' back doors (left the local church), not much longer than when they first "swung in through the front doors" (joined the local church). As the Baptist Covenant implies, Christians have a responsibility to watch over, provide, guide, exhort, stir up, guard and participate in each other's joys and sorrows. More than ever, these practices should be embraced in order to show love and to help assimilate, reclaim and activate church members into the body of

¹ *The New National Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: National Baptist Publishing Board).

Christ, hoping that our actions of Christian concern and love will help to slow down or halt the “swinging doors” that prevail in some of our churches.

Historically, the biblical precedent usually used to support church membership retention can be found in the book of Acts 3:41-47:

Then they that received his word were baptized and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers. And fear became upon every soul and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together and had all things common. And sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men as every man had need. And they continued daily with one accord breaking bread from house to house did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart. Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

It is here that Luke, the writer of Acts, shows the Christian Church in its infancy and how they grew because of the closeness, love and care that church members had for one another. These church members were filled with the love of Christ, which was demonstrated in the way that everyone had all things in common and shared their goods to meet each other’s needs. The care, love and concern that the church in Jerusalem showed for one another, along with their zeal for worship, and brotherly/sisterly love, became contagious and, as a result, the church began to grow with little or no decline during that period. In short, the church grew because it demonstrated the type of behavior that could lead others to Christ. One commentary points to the fact that this scripture gives a good example of what characteristics the Christians possessed in the early church and that we also need today to show love and care for each other as followers of Christ.

Matthew Henry’s commentary states:

In these verses we have the history of the truly primitive church, of the first days of its infancy indeed, but like that, the state of its

greatest innocence. They kept close to holy ordinances, and abounded in piety and devotion; for Christianity, when admitted in the power of it, will dispose the soul to communion with God in all those ways wherein he has appointed us to meet him, and has promised to meet us. The greatness of the event raised them above the world, and the Holy Ghost filled them with such love, as made every one to be to another as to his/herself, and so made all things common, not by destroying property, but doing away with selfishness, and causing charity.²

Like the early church, which Henry described, our churches today need that same kind of love, care and concern in order to effectively deal with the “swinging door problem.” The problem will continue to increase if nothing is done to try to stop it. But because Christians should have everything in common, we have an obligation to show care and love to those who are straying within our churches.

There are many reasons why there should be an interest in helping to slow down or stop the swinging door. However, the most important of these reasons is that it shows concern to those who may feel unloved, not cared for, or who feel like they don’t belong to the church, even though their names may be on the church rolls. In addition to this reason, the “swinging door problem” can be detrimental to local churches because it affects church attendance, membership roll statistics, and other church program activities. The “swinging door problem” also may affect the fellowship of the saints, as well as the individual lives of many Christians. In his book, *Assimilation, Reclamation, and Church Growth*, Thom S. Rainer stresses how serious the “swinging door” problem has become within churches. He states:

When churches seek to get people into their fellowship, they are attempting to open “the front door.” Keeping those members in the church, active and fulfilled is called “closing the back door.” Keeping the back door closed is a major problem in most churches

² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1975).

today. A church with half of its membership in attendance is considered successful by most standards.³

According to statistics about membership retention, Rainer is correct. Keeping the “swinging door” or what he refers to as the “back door” closed is indeed a major problem within local Christian churches today. Because this is a prevalent problem, several questions must be answered for us to gauge how to deal with the problem.

The first question is: why do some churches continue to decline in membership while others continue to grow? In their book entitled, *Church and Denominational Growth*, Roozen and Hadaway sought to answer this question. These authors conducted research and compiled a series of essays that evaluated the cause of church growth and decline within local churches and denominations.⁴ Roozen and Hadaway’s main focus in their research centered on congregations and relationships. As a result of their work and studies, these authors composed seven articles that details why some congregations continue to decline in church membership, while others continuously grow. Listed below is a summary of their findings:

1. Churches that grow have a greater commitment of members, while churches that experience constant decline do not. Members of growing and stable congregations exhibit greater institutional commitment than congregations that are declining.
2. Growing congregations emphasize an outreach or outward orientation and make outreach and evangelism a responsibility of all of the members, while churches that experience constant decline do not.

³ Rainer, *Book of Church Growth*, 28.

⁴ Roozen and Hadaway, *Growth and Denominational Growth*, 129-133.

3. Newer congregations are better able to integrate new members than older congregations and are less likely to grow than younger ones.
4. Congregation-based conflict has a direct correlation with congregational membership decline.
5. Larger Suburban congregations with membership of more than 500 are more effected by community context, demography and social-economical impact than that of smaller urban and rural churches.
6. Correlation of growth and retention vary by local and church type. Smaller churches and churches in rural areas are less effected by their contexts and by institutional change. They experience less dramatic changes in population than metropolitan areas.
7. Denominational affiliations are a significant correlation of growth, over and above the action taken by a local church. Religious denominations either encourage or discourage growth.
8. Programmatic efforts to achieve growth often result in more membership activity than substantial growth.

While this research helped to examine some of the causes of church growth and decline, there is another prevailing question to be examined. The question is: how can a church incorporate new church members while at the same time develop effective strategies for keeping current church members active and involved? This is an important question. If churches desire to follow the example of the early New Testament church that was founded by Christ, they must express the same concerns and love as the early church. Rainer expressed this same concept when he asked:

What can we do to regain the spirit of the early church where Christians devoted themselves to the fellowship and where all the believers were together (Acts 2:42.44)? How can we assimilate new member, and how can we reclaim inactive members? Those are two back door questions.⁵

Flavil R. Yeakley asked a similar question. He writes

The variety of elements, which contribute to a successful incorporation strategy, takes such study and consideration. Yet, the dual tasks of creating sufficient roles for a growing membership and then communicating those opportunities for involvement are certainly two important ingredients of a successful incorporation.⁶

Seeking to answer his own question, Yeakley conducted research in which he analyzed 48 congregations that were chosen on the basis of their net growth rate. The net growth rate was defined as the adult conversion rate minus the dropout of converts.

As we address the “swinging door problem,” another question is: what type of strategies can help a church to better assimilate church members? The subject matter experts imply that the more people are assimilated into church activities and into the membership, the more likely they will stay a member of a local church. In their book, *Finding Them, Keeping Them*, Gary MacIntosh and Glen Martin gives some insight as they provide some viable strategies for keeping church members.⁷ These strategies include Developing Friendships; Forming Relationships Prior To Membership; Member’s Involvement in Ministry, Ministering To Small Groups; Spiritual Developing of New Members; and Having a Clear Vision. A summary of each strategy is explained below:

⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁶ Yeakley, “Growth and Assimilation,” 17-18.

⁷ McIntosh, and Martin, *Finding Them Keeping Them*.

1. *Meaningful Friendships* – Members are more likely to stay at a church where they have developed friendships. People, especially new church members, need church friends in order to feel a sense of belonging.
2. *Forming Relationships Prior To Church Membership* – Getting acquainted with prospective members must start before the person makes a decision to join the church. This will help to form a relationship with the new member before he or she comes to church. If the leaders and church members are successful in motivation to invite and bring their friends to church, evangelism and assimilation can become one victorious step.
3. *Involvement in Ministry* – McIntosh and Martin state that, while attempting to close the back door, the church should encourage new members to become involved. Involved members who are active in church will most likely feel they are a part of the church.
4. *Small Group Participation* – The fourth strategy for church assimilation is to have new members to become part of small groups within the congregation. The impact of small groups is essential in creating a sense of belonging. The authors define “small” as being ten, the maximum size where everyone in a group can have the opportunity to interact with the rest of the group. Furthermore, they suggested that those church members in classes of twenty, thirty, forty, or more are not reaping the benefits of a small group. As a result, they suggest that small group dynamics may operate better in a non-church location.

5. *Spiritual Growth* – The final key to assimilation, say MacIntosh and Martin, is spiritual growth. Such is the discipleship thrust of the Church Growth Movement. The deeper the level of discipleship, the more likely assimilation is to take place. Church leaders must seek innovative and challenging ways for all members to have opportunities to grow in Christ.
6. *Having A Clear Vision* – Finally, the writers say that a clear vision is crucial to for church assimilation. A clear Great Commission vision creates a sense of “being on the team.”

If churches really desire to keep their members, strategies such as the ones provided by McIntosh and Martin are essential. It is not enough for people to merely be on the church roll books, but they must also feel that they are part of the church family. Lyle Schaller informs us that there is considerable evidence that suggests that one-third of all Protestant church members do not feel a sense of belonging.⁸ Furthermore, he says the following about church members who are straying, inactive, or who have already left the local church membership:

They have been received into membership, but have never felt they have been accepted into the fellowship circle. Church members obviously need to develop relationships with new members. This is rarely successful with programs; instead, regular emphasis on friendliness and openness will motivate members to welcome new comers into their friendship circles.

Without feeling like they are really a part of the church membership, there will continue to be an escalation of church member dropouts. One of the main reasons why people join any organization, including the church, is for the purpose of belonging. They

⁸ Lyle E. Schaller, *Assimilating New Members* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1978).

desire to befriend and to fellowship. Without this sacred communion, they will become unattached and soon stop attending the particular organizational meetings. This especially applies to membership within the local church. Rick Warren in his book, *The Purpose Driven Church* reminds us that:

As Christians we're called to belong, not just to believe. We are not meant to live lone ranger lives; instead, we are to belong to Christ's family and be members of his body. Baptism is not only a symbol of salvation; it is a symbol of fellowship. It not only symbolizes our new life in Christ; it visualizes a person's incorporation into the body of Christ. It says to the world that this new member is now one of us. In essence, this connotes that when new believers are baptized; they should be welcomed into the fellowship of the family of God. Knowing that they are part of the body of Christ.⁹

What Warren's writing gives us is a look at why people become comfortable with some churches and stay, while others become uncomfortable and leave. The answer is simple—the ones that stay feel welcomed and incorporated into the church, while the others don't feel this way. In the *Adventist Review*, Monte Sahlin, Vice President for Creative Ministries in the Columbia Union Conference, did research to address the question of what happens to people who join the Adventist Church that makes people want to stay and maintain their memberships?¹⁰ The answers he gives come from six hundred and fifty church member interviews. Sahlin found that people stayed members of the churches because of the following reasons:

1. *Bonding* - If the new member finds at least six friends among the congregation during the first year, he is likely to stay in the church. The definition is very precise here. "Friends" means church members who spend time with the new member

⁹ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*.

¹⁰ Monte Sahlin, "An Affluent Outreach," *Adventist Review*, Available at <http://www.Adventistreview.org/2002-1535/story 1.html>; Internet.

outside any structured church activity. The specific activity may vary. It may include activities such as recreation, concerts, and leisurely conversations over lunch, which are just as important to the mission of the church as evangelists who persuasively present Christ to large crowds.

2. *Involvement* - If the new member is asked to take a role in the activities of the church, she is likely to stay active. Again, the definition is very precise. The responsibilities given to a new member must be given early on and be appropriate to a newcomer. The key is to find things in which a new member can easily succeed. This builds their confidence and encourages them to do more.
3. *Spiritual Growth* - If the new member is given the opportunity to continue to grow in Christ, ask questions, and explore practical topics, she is likely to remain a church member. One of the mistakes that is often made that results in losing a new member is the termination of weekly bible studies. "It was great," one former member recalled to me. "I was getting all this attention. The pastor or one of the elders came to my home weekly to study the bible with me, then when I was baptized, immediately they quit coming."
4. *Grace* - If the new member experiences understanding, acceptance, and forgiveness during his halting steps as a "babe in Christ," he is more likely to remain a member. In fact, many of the dropouts interviewed reported that observing someone else in the congregation being treated in a judgmental way led them to quit attending.

One straying member who was interviewed said, “I was not as good as that person who was treated harshly and I was afraid they would do and say the same things about me when they found out.”

Although some may feel that the “swinging door problem” is primarily an issue that pastors and top leaders should address, the truth is that it is an issue that every true Christian should be educated about and attempt to do something about. The church as a whole must come together and attack the problem in unity. Unity or togetherness is what the Christian church is about. In fact, the prayer that Christ made to God before His crucifixion was “Lord make them one, as we are one.” Rick Warren in his book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, speaks of what he calls the five signs of unity that make good relationships within a church’s fellowship.¹¹ These signs are based on Acts 2:41-47. Warren labels them as follows: Way of Entrance, Authority of Apostolic Leaders, Fellowship of Believers, Commonality of Property and Witness of Joy, which resulted in public respect and daily conversions. Warren’s signs suggest that real Christian unity happens when church members feel assimilation; that is, when all members have been bound together to the point that they have daily fellowship and meaningful communication with each other.

The church is able to provide a safe place for nurturing relationships. Thus, it is the responsibility of all members to show love and unity to straying members, but it is primarily the task of church leaders to take the initiative to exchange thoughts and ideas, to show the love of Christ and to establish loving and unified relationships within the church membership. The leaders can’t wait on the inactive members to make it happen.

¹¹ Ibid.

They simply won't do it; that's why we call them inactive. Therefore, the active must reach out to the inactive members to help them to assimilate into the fold of Christ.

While much of the research and reviews of literature in this paper have rightfully focused on the assimilation of church members, it is also important to address the subject of "reclamation" as it relates to the "swinging-door problem." The word "reclamation" has the same meaning as the word "reclaiming" which, according to *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, has two definitions. The first definition means to recall from wrong or improper conduct, and the second means to make available for human use by changing natural conditions.¹² The straying church members can be characterized by both of these definitions because their inactivity connotes an improper relationship with fellow Christians and, as a result, the status of the straying members need changing so that they can be available for use in the house of God.

Church members who need reclaiming are a bit different than those who are only inactive. For the most part, they seem to have given up on the local church of which they are members. In many churches, the church leaders and administrators just write these members off and take them off the church register. In some cases, this may be the right thing to do, but should every person who left be forgotten? The answer is no. Historically, the bible informs us that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, was very concerned about reclaiming those who had gone astray. Perhaps nowhere in the scriptures is this be more evident than in Luke 15, which will be discussed further in the biblical section of this project. The main point is that our Lord had, and still has, a special interest in reclaiming those who have gone astray.

¹² *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1977), 965.

Reclaiming the lost, however, may be easier said than done. Thom Rainer informs us that, if churches effectively integrated all new members, reclamation would not need to be addressed. Church leaders must recognize that reclamation is the most difficult type of outreach.¹³ Rainer goes on to explain why it is so difficult to reclaim those who have already left the church. Rainer says that often something that is perceived as negative usually preceded a person's leaving or they are becoming inactive within the church. The negative incident may have been a single event, such as a dispute with another church member, but the writer believes that most dropouts simply became bored with the church because they never felt part of it anyway. As a result of such prevailing attitudes, trying to convince those who have left to become active again is difficult at best. Simply put, unhappy members don't plan to come back to a place where they once felt uncomfortable and/or unhappy before.

Rainer is not alone, for there are others who support the premise that it's very difficult to reclaim church members once they have left their local churches. For example, David Stewart warns that converts are much easier kept than recovered. Stewart suggests that people will join churches because of some specific motivational factor or challenge. Some examples of these factors are inspiration, preaching, singing, or various programs. These factors will keep people coming for a while, but he believes what keeps people coming back in the long run are the habits that they form, not the motivational factors themselves. In Stewart's own words:

Motivation may get people into the Church, but what keeps people coming back? What helps some members to experience consistent growth and endure through adversity, while other stagnate or fall away? Motivation gets you started, and habits keep you going. That

¹³ Rainer, *Book of Church Growth*.

is why an emphasis on the solid development of gospel habits before baptism is important. A wise church will try to keep the members they have rather than to try and recover them. Keeping the church members that one has is crucial if the church wants to close the back door. All too often the church is so occupied with bringing in the “new harvest” till they forget about those members that are already a part of God’s church. If these members are overlooked too often, the frequent reality is that many of those who have joined through the front door of the church will leave through the back door almost as quickly.¹⁴

In order for the “swinging door” to slow down, it is clear by the research and articles reviewed so far that both assimilation and reclamation strategies must be instituted within the local church. But what will there be for the member after they are assimilated and reclaimed? It has already been suggested that one of the reasons members leave is boredom. When one does not feel that they belong, it is often because they are not contributing. This may also apply to straying church members. It is this writer’s feeling that every church member should be actively involved, not just in fellowship, but in the work of the church. Every member should feel like they have contributed something. In a recent article in the *Biblical Recorder*, Mark Wingfield raises an issue that sooner or later confronts every church and pastor. If church membership involves responsibility on each member’s part, what can be done to encourage each member to accept that responsibility?¹⁵ Basically speaking, he believed that the words “inactive church members” are both foreign and inconsistent with the original New Testament Church model. In fact, according to the words of Jesus in the twenty-eighth chapter of Matthew, it is every church member’s job to “go,” that is, to take action by witnessing to the world. Wingfield believes that there is no way to minister to the “unknown” or to the “non-resident” who

¹⁴ Stewart, “100% Convert Reaction Guide.”

¹⁵ Mark Wingfield, *Biblical Recorder*, 1998; Available at <http://www.org/opinion>; Internet; Accessed on August 30, 2002.

has moved away. As a result, his church took several steps to help all members become active. The church adopted a biblical philosophy of ministry that church membership implies accountability (and that it is two-way) and activity. This has had a positive effect on the church and its membership's health. Once members became active, they became more responsible and accountable. They also began to act as personal owners of the church. The historical data received from this research has been both inspirational and enlightening. The information will be useful and viable in the formation of a model for the slowing down of the "swinging door" through assimilation, reclamation and activation strategies.

Biblical Foundation

The Holy Bible informs us that, throughout history, God has always shown His love and concern for His special people. The term "special people" refers to those whom God has entered into covenant with and/or those He has called out to do His work and to witness for Him. Examples of these special groups are the Children of Israel in Old Testament Scripture and the Early Christians in New Testament Scripture. How God felt about both of these groups can be seen in the countless ways God loved, guided, corrected, comforted, provided, and even performed miracles for those people who were dear to His heart. Henry H. Halley expresses God's love for His people in his valuable *Bible Handbook*.¹⁶ He says:

Love is the premier teaching of Christianity, and an undying expression of Jesus' doctrine. It is more potent for the building of the Church than any or all, of the various manifestations of God's power. Love is the Church's most effective weapon, without which all the various gifts of the Spirit are of no avail Love is the essence

¹⁶ Henry H. Halley, *Halley's Bible Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1927).

of God's nature, as well as the perfection of human character. Love is the most powerful, ultimate force in the Universe.

God's love and concern for his people today still prevails. As the Christian community endeavors to be like Christ, it must understand that the manifestation of God's love shown by God's people can be a powerful instrument in seeking to retain local church membership. As we attempt to mirror the love that the Lord has for us, it is natural to assume that He expects His church, those who have been adopted into His family, to show the same love and concern for others, including those who may be in trouble, straying from the fold, or in need of help. However, the question arises "where can we find biblical references that express God's desire for us to be concerned about our brothers and sisters of the faith?"

While the bible contains many passages that detail God's desire for His people to be concerned about others of the spiritual family, this writer's discussion will be based upon three main scriptures, including an Old and New Testament reference, as well as the words of concern expressed by Jesus himself.

Old Testament Reference

Although some view the work of the prophet Nehemiah as a builder of the wall of Jerusalem, it is this writer's belief that Nehemiah rebuilt the wall out of a heart of love and concern for God's people. In the book, *Great People of the Bible and How They Lived*, the author supports this belief.¹⁷ He states:

While loyal to the Persian king, Nehemiah was also a Jew with strong sympathy for his struggling people. He urged Artaxerxes to let him go to Jerusalem and service the building of the walls.

¹⁷ *Great People of the Bible and How They Lived* (Pleasantville, NY: Readers Digest Association, Inc.) 251.

Despite Samaritan protest, the king agreed and, according to the Bible, the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt in an astounding 52 days. Artaxerxes was impressed enough by this to make Judah a separate province under the governorship of Nehemiah, and a new stage in Israel's history seemed to have begun.

In his book entitled *The Social Vision of the Hebrew Bible*, J. David Pleins further details how Nehemiah had a concern for his people that extended beyond the act of rebuilding of a physical wall. He writes:

The memoir would have presented Nehemiah as a royally, charged figure of the city's walls. The Nehemiah of the initial phase was a reformist or activist who censured the local, Judean nobles and prefects—internal opponents—for communal injustices (chapter 5), much as did Udjahorresne, prominent collaborator and chief physician under the Persian conqueror of Egypt Cambyses (530-522 B.C.E.), and Darius I (521-486 B.C.E.), and Darius I (521-486 B.C.E.) who brought legal reforms to Egypt. The people dedicated themselves to the task (Neh. 2:18; cf. 3:38) but became their own enemies as social injustices proliferated . . . Nehemiah's program have had to sell off home, vineyards, and fields not only to pay off the royal taxes but also to simply acquire food to live (6:1-5).¹⁸

Thus, it is contended that because of Nehemiah's concern for the physical and social welfare of his people, he is an excellent example for insight into how the called out of God should possess a desire and concern about His people's status and welfare.

A brief look at Nehemiah 1:1-11 further reveals Nehemiah's concern and love for God's people after he heard about the negative conditions that they were now facing in Jerusalem. It reads:

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, That Hanani, one of my brethren, came and he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said unto me, the remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach; the wall of

¹⁸ J. David Pleins, *The Social Vision of the Hebrew Bible, A Theological Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, John Knox Press, 2001), 183.

Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven. And said, I beseech thee, Oh Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments. Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee, both I and my father's house have sinned. We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandest thy servant Moses. Remember, I beseech thee, the words that thou commandest thy servant Moses, saying, if ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations. But if ye turn unto me, keep my commandments, and do them, though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou has redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. Oh Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

A close look at this scripture reveals three concerns that Nehemiah had concerning his people. First, Nehemiah recognized that his people were scattered and that they needed to come together to bring about assimilation. The report Nehemiah received stated that the remnant was scattered. The people now existed in different locations, under different conditions, with different frames of mind. Even more serious, they were in great affliction and reproach. The word remnant means "a part of the whole," thus, we find that a part of the Jews, like Nehemiah, were still living and doing well in the land of captivity, and others were left behind in Jerusalem, a broken city that had been burned with fire. Nehemiah was disturbed by this inconsistency. Even though God had allowed him to gain the favor of the king, even though he was now living large and had a lofty position as the king's cupbearer, Nehemiah had compassion and concern for the remnant, his brothers and sisters who were

separated from him. In fact, it says that Nehemiah wept, and mourned for certain days and prayed to God after hearing this sad report. It was this attitude towards his fallen people and their broken wall that led Nehemiah to take action to change this condition.

Mercer's Dictionary of the Bible supports this assertion by saying:

The resultant story of Nehemiah's heroic and generous efforts to restore Jerusalem's fortification, enlarged its population, provided for the people's physical needs, and carried out certain cultic needs.¹⁹

In order to be of assistance in the retention of church members, the leaders and entire church body must also be concerned for those that stray, which can be symbolically referred to as the remnant of the church. Many who leave the church find themselves in similar conditions to the remnant that was in Jerusalem. They find themselves in affliction and reproach and without church walls that serve as their protection. Like Nehemiah, the church must leave its comfort zone; leave that which brings about separation to bring about oneness and assimilation in the body of Christ.

Second, Nehemiah saw a need for restoration and reclamation. After many years in exile, the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem. Upon their arrival they found that they did not possess the unity, power or authority that they previously had. In response to this predicament, Nehemiah, after praying for God's guidance, asked the king for permission to go back to Jerusalem for the purpose of doing two things, restoration and reclamation. If churches today desire to be as effective as Nehemiah, they must have that same spirit of restoration and reclamation. The church must seek to reclaim the members who have gone astray and to build up walls of protection to ensure them of safety. The

¹⁹ *Mercer's Dictionary of the Bible* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1990), 609.

church, like Nehemiah must take back, authority and ownership that previously belonged to them.

Third, the text points to a need for activation. After hearing Hanani's assessment of the condition of his people, Nehemiah sought to take action. In doing so, he received the permission of the king and resources to rebuild the Jerusalem wall and to help his people. But Nehemiah did not take action alone; he mobilized and led a group of people to take action. The book *Who's Who in the Bible* informs us of the results of Nehemiah's activity:

He organized the people of Judah and centered them on the task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. The project came to serve as a focal point for the devastated community. As the work progressed, their sense of pride, of community, and of heritage began to return.²⁰

While the entire story of his efforts to carry out this task is long and cumbersome, the fact is that Nehemiah's efforts involved some of the people who were part of the remnant and, as a result, they accomplished their mission. The church today can learn much about how having concern and love like Nehemiah can help them to be successful also.

New Testament Reference

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, the apostle Paul wrote to a church whose members seemed to show very little concern or love for each other. The evidence of this lack of concern was demonstrated by the attitudes and the way that these church members treated one another. The church was filled with contempt, hatred, envy, and strife as members

²⁰ *Who's Who In The Bible, The Essential Biographical Dictionary* (Publishing International, Ltd., 1998), 400.

possessed argumentative spirits, selfish egos, loose morals, and intellectual pride. In fact the word “division” is the buzzword that best described the membership attitude within this congregation.

In John Balchin’s *Compact Survey of the Bible*, he notes that church members were divided for many reasons and across many lines. There were divisions between: rich and poor; educated and uneducated; those who liked Paul’s simple style of leadership and those who did not; those who felt that freedom in Christ meant liberation from Jewish holidays, laws, and religious practices and those who felt that in order to be a true Christian one must convert to Judaism.²¹ In addition, jealousy existed between those who supposedly possessed the kind of flashy gifts that suggested true enlightenment and those who did not. Seeing that these attitudes were bringing about an uncaring, non-sharing and divided church, Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, of which he was the founder, saying:

For the body is one, and with many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, is one body, so also is Christ. For one Spirit makes us all free, and we have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it, or one member is honored, all members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular.

In his letter, Paul first informed the church that they should be assimilated. He explained that they all had a common spiritual identity that assimilates them into one family of God. The word “assimilation” means to combine, or to bring together. This is what Paul had in mind as he spoke to this church. His emphasis was on bringing the entire congregation together in the spirit of unity. In verse 13 of this text, Paul goes on to say:

²¹ John Balchin, *The Compact Survey Of The Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1987), 215.

“For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body.” In other words, while the Corinthian church members were seeing themselves as separate spiritual entities, Paul was informing them that, because they were of the body of Christ, and because all the parts of the body are a part of one body, they too must become a unified caring spiritual body, that is assimilated by one common spirit that has made all believers partakers of the sacrifice of Jesus through the spirit of God.²²

The second idea that Paul expresses in this letter is the idea of reclamation. The word “reclamation” means to be reclaimed. It connotes that something has been put back into its proper place. This is what Paul suggests happens to every Christian when they drink of the spirit of Christ. They become part of God’s kingdom, a privilege that mankind lost because of the sin of Adam, but which is now available again through Jesus Christ. Paul writes: “and we were all made to drink of one spirit.” Being made to drink of one spirit refers to the fact that all Christians have been saved and reclaimed from sin by one source. That source is Jesus Christ who died, rose from the grave, and saved all Christians from their sins. Here Paul points out that the only thing that we can really brag about as Christians is that we have one spiritual life source that reclaims us as sons and daughters. The spiritual life force that reclaims us as His own is Jesus Christ our Lord and it is the same force that calls for all Christians to show concern, care and love for each other.

Third, Paul addresses membership activation. He says that the body of Christ is activated when there are no schisms in the body and members are showing that they care for each other by suffering and or rejoicing together. The bottom line of this letter is that Paul wrote to the Corinthians to let them know that they were responsible to watch over

²² *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988).

and care for one another. Although each member has his or her own gifts and talents, all church members are dependent upon one another and are expected to receive help from the rest. In reference to this text and also to the relationship that all Christians should have toward one another, Allen R. Hunt identifies this relationship as a “communal inspiration.”

He writes:

Paul set forth for the first time the specific of his broad notion of communal inspiration. There are variations of gifts, variations of service, and variations of working (12:4-6). To each Christian is given one or more gifts, and this endowment works via the work of the Spirit (12:7 & 11). In other words, all Christians are inspired, and therefore, the community is inspired. In fact all the gifts are to be used for the common good.²³

Assuming that Hunt’s statement is correct, it stands to reason that the modern day church should also work towards using its inspired gifts to reach out to all members, including those who have become victims of the “swinging door problem.” In his writings, Mark Hanby states this best. He declares:

We cannot ignore each other’s needs and still claim to have a spiritual relationship to God. Finally, the church was divinely structured to “network,” to function together as a living organism to foster health in the whole. God never intended for the pastor or his small staff to care for the whole body. That is a modern man-made custom born out of convenience, pride, and selfishness. Each of us must be “fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love,” (Eph. 4:16). Every part has a vital place and purpose in the house that God is building.²⁴

²³ Allen R. Hunt, *The Inspired Body* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 11.

²⁴ Mark Hanby, *The House That God Built* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publications, 1993), 63.

Jesus' Own Words

The foremost example of what the church's attitude should be as it pertains to retaining members through assimilation, reclamation and acclamation is expressed in three similar parables given by Jesus Christ. Jesus says:

What man of you having a hundred sheep if he loses one of them doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep, which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors, saying, rejoice with me, for I have found the piece, which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. And he said, a certain man had two sons and the younger of them said to his father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, how many hired servants of my father's have bread enough to spare, and I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father, but when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servant, bring forth the best robe, and put it on him and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and be merry for

this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost, and is now found and they began to be merry.²⁵

The proper exegesis of these parables points to Christ's great love for those who stray and become lost from the fold. It is plain to see from these stories how patiently and diligently our Lord works to keep his own in His fellowship by forming Christian relationships. Findley B. Edge, the author of *Doctrine of the Laity*, states:

The entire life and ministry of Jesus demonstrates Jesus' concern for people in their human hurts, as well as His concern for people finding salvation through a personal relationship with God.²⁶

Jesus' concern for all of the lost is also shown in each parable for they show that all people are precious to Him, to the point that rejoicing takes place when the shepherd finds the sheep, the woman finds the lost coin, and the prodigal son returns to his father. Thus, these parables show our Lord's concern for the assimilation, reclamation and activation of the lost or strayed. The sheep, the coin, and the son were once assembled to a group, but in the story we find that they left the group and were no longer assimilated. All three subjects of the parables had been lost, but were reclaimed once they were found. All three were activated or placed back in action. The sheep was placed back in the field to graze and make wool. The coin was once again available for spending. The son was given his former privileges back in his father's house. Thus, that which was inactive was once again active, which is one of primary aims of retention of church members according to the word of God. In fact, in Matthew 28: 19-20, Jesus commissions his followers to go and make those who are inactive active in the Kingdom of God. He commands the disciples to:

²⁵ Holy Bible, KJV, Luke 15: 4-24

²⁶ Findley B. Edge, *the Doctrine of the Laity* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1985), 62

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

In this reference text, Jesus commands activation from His followers. The job of the disciples was to go and carry the gospel, the good news of Christ. This connotes that becoming active is an essential responsibility of every Christian, including those who have remained faithful and those who must be reclaimed as well. This exemplifies the fact that God is concerned about His people and He expects them to be concerned about each other and to follow His examples of love and concern.

As the modern day church embraces God's heart of concern, it will become more attentive to church members who are at risk of straying from the church and hopefully it will develop programs and procedures that will help to assimilate, reclaim, and activate those members back into the body of Christ.

Theological Foundation

In his book, *King Among the Theologians*, Noel Erskine explained the task of theology in this way:

The moral task of the theologian then becomes the proclamation of the dominion of God and the struggle in history to make God's dominion a present reality. The central task of the theologian is not so much the arbitration between theology and philosophy as assessment of what must be done in history to effect the restored and reconciled community.²⁷

According this understanding of theology, theology exists as a means to realize how the attributes of God are present in the face of human situations. The theological concept that undergirds the need for the church to embrace the need to assimilate, reclaim

²⁷ Noel Leo Erskine, *King Among the Theologians* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1994), 9.

and activate straying church members is reconciliation. Throughout the world, there seems to be a spirit and tendency for people to embrace individualism and separatism. To some, this spirit may suggest that one should only be interested in themselves, without having to be concerned or responsible for existing in a wholesome, spiritual and social relationship with others. In essence, this attitude suggests that wholesome relationships are a “take it or leave it” proposition. As a result, instead of working through a problem until it is resolved, some people would rather sever the relationship and separate themselves from communicating with others. While this attitude may be fine for secular society, it is in direct conflict with the Christian's conceptual framework, for Christians are required to show both love and care through the ministry of reconciliation.

Theologically speaking, the most viable reason to be concerned about the “swinging door problem,” is for the purpose of “reconciliation.” The theological foundation that promotes love and care for straying church members is reconciliation. If the church honestly desires to halt or slow down the “swinging door problem,” it must seek to reconcile with those church members who have gone astray regardless of their reasons for leaving the church. According to *Webster's Dictionary*, the word “reconcile” means to restore to friendship or harmony. It also means to settle or to resolve.²⁸ If church members are truly concerned over those who have gone astray or who feel uninvolved, they must seek to settle or resolve the issues that straying members have and restore them back into the friendship, harmony, and fellowship of the mainstream of the church congregation.

²⁸ *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*.

Throughout the bible, reconciliation is a dominant theme that expresses God's concern for His people. God demonstrated His love and care for the world and the church by sending Jesus His only Son to reconcile us back to Him. The bible in II Corinthians 5:17-21 tells us:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God was making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf, Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In this passage, Paul argued that the death of Jesus brought humanity to a place of harmony with God. But there is also an experiential dimension to reconciliation. Paul tells us not only are we to live in harmony with God, but we are also to reflect in our righteous living this same reconciling spirit because we are God's ambassadors. If members of the church are indeed ambassadors for Christ, they can no longer sit passively and allow some of the local membership to stray without actively seeking to keep and restore them into the local church congregation. The ministry of reconciliation can never be a passive acceptance of a theological truth, but it must include active participation. Many churches are often guilty of neglecting this fact.

To be an ambassador for Christ is to be reconciled in wherever relationships are broken, in whatever situation God has placed us. This includes those relationships that have been broken as they apply to church members who have left the local congregation because of personal problems, feelings of not belonging and being unassimilated, and even church conflict. The bottom line is that, just as God through Jesus Christ reconciled the

sinner back to him and restored harmony with them, as ambassadors of God we must do the same to those lost and/or disenchanted former and straying church members.

Reconciliation allows us to be reconciled to God, community, and self. In a recent Internet article by the St. Paul Parish located in Pensacola, Florida, the author wrote:

Reconciliation enables us to be reconciled to God, community, and self when we have fallen away, or have alienated ourselves from God, our community, and ultimately from our very selves.²⁹

This statement is true for reconciliation offers a face-to-face encounter with the love and forgiveness of God. A ministry of reconciliation is impossible to administer without the possession of God's love within a believer. It takes love to notice that some members are straying from the church. It takes love to care that they are straying from the church. It takes love to reach out to straying church members. It takes love to listen and learn their reasons for leaving and disagreements. It takes love to avoid judging those who have left or who are not faithful church members. Love is the major force that can lead to reconciliation, for if the strayed member is to make a turn around and decide to try to become a more participating church member, love will have to abide, because the bible declares that "Love covers a multitude of faults (sins)." John 3:16 explains this by saying: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but they should have everlasting life."

It is interesting to note in John 3:16 that reconciliation not only loves, but that it also gives. Note here that God not only loved the world in theory, but that he put His love in action by saving the world. That's reconciliation. God reconciled the world by giving His only begotten son who He treasured to express His love toward the world.

²⁹ St. Paul Parish Article <http://stpaul.ptdiocese.org/reconciliation.html>.

Because God loved the world to the fullest extent, Christ's death made atonement for mankind's sins. As a result, God has given all authority to Christ, so much so that salvation can only come through Him. Act 4:12 reads, "neither is there any other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved." Thus, everyone who confesses Jesus as Lord and Savior becomes a Christian, one who follows the love and example of Christ. Keith Russell, president of New York Theological Seminary, stated in a sermon entitled, "How Ministry Shapes the Church":³⁰

The church is nothing more and nothing less than a community of people who abide in the presence of the Messiah and who practice the same practices. The church is defined by its ministry and recognized as being faithful to Jesus by the work it does... The church is that community of believers who, living in messianic power, perform messianic ministry . . . The church does not shape its own ministry; it is shaped by the ministry which is given to it by virtue of its being a community of Messiah-believing, Messiah practicing men and women.

Like Christ, Christians must also seek to demonstrate a reconciliation spirit in order to show their love for their brothers and sisters in an active way. This is especially true as it relates to straying and wayward church members. The people of God must take action to find out: why members stray, what can be done to stop or decrease membership straying, what are the special needs and concerns of straying members, and what may need to be changed or implemented in the local church's methods and procedures that can help to more adequately assimilate, reclaim and activate straying church members. When Christians within a church fellowship express these concerns, reconciliation becomes possible and the love of Christ is demonstrated in the following three ways.

³⁰ Keith Russell, "How Ministry Shapes the Church," Sermon at New York Theological Seminary.

First, love is demonstrated through Christian discipleship. In John 13:35 Jesus tells his followers, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another.” The term “one for another” is inclusive of all those who are followers of Christ, including straying, inactive or church members who feel left out of the mainstream of church membership activities. According to this scripture, the true Christian disciple must express active love and concern for these members to emulate the love of Christ, their Lord and Savior. The body of Christ must express love in deeds, conversation and evaluation, in hopes that these members will maintain faith in Christ and remain in the local church household.

Secondly, concern for those who stray away from the church membership is the true test of Christianity. In 1 Peter 1:22, the writer admonishes every Christian by saying, “Love one another with a pure heart fervently.” The word “fervently” refers to the extent that Christians should love. It implies that Christians should not only love one another in a casual manner, but they should have deep love for one another. This love should not be reserved for those who have already fit into the church culture and system, but it should reach out to those who don’t yet feel included. Unless this love is shown for all, it can make Christians appear as hypocrites, instead of followers of Christ. Even though it may be true in some cases that some members have strayed by their own choice and they may be guilty of seeking to carry out their own agendas and bad intentions by doing so, the body of Christ must still attempt to reach out to those members.

Jabez Burns believes that unless love is deep and fervent, it is false and hypocritical. He states, “Without love all religious profession is mere glitter, an empty show, a noisy cymbal.”³¹

Thirdly, Christians who show concern for straying and wayward members demonstrate the agape love of God and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The word “agape” refers to the unconditional love that God has for all of His believers. He is concerned about our welfare in spite of our setbacks, deficiencies, and sins. Christ remains concerned and expects Christians to remain concerned for each other regardless of the situations they may be going through. As straying and wayward members may be experiencing confusion, helplessness, anger, feeling of abandonment or exclusion, the church must show them the agape, unconditional love of Christ and take steps to restore them back into the fellowship through the spirit of reconciliation.

In fact, 1 Corinthians 13 also speaks of the power and attitude of those who possess agape love. In the King James Version, it uses the word charity to mean love. It says:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind, charity envieth not, charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh not evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth. Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part and we

5. ³¹ Jabez Burns, *Sermon Outline Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publishing Company, 1987),

prophecy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three but the greatest of these is charity.

It is plain to see the emphasis that Paul, the writer of this text, places on agape, the unconditional love that Christians have for one another. This love supercedes the talents, sacrifices, gifts and any other actions that one may show. The bottom line is that love outweighs everything else. This must be the major theme of Christians today as they attempt to slow down or to stop the swinging doors of churches today. Laurence O.

Richards writes:

God's love then is intended to find living expressions in the community of those who know Jesus. In fact, the NT emphasis is placed on the love we are to express to one another. The Epistles speak even more of that love, intended to infuse relationships between believers.³²

The work of bringing about reconciliation is not an option for the church. It is to go about, as Jesus did, doing good, healing teaching, forgiving, and comforting.

It is hoped that the church in this context, as well as others, will express love and concern to help bring about assimilation, reclamation and activation of straying and inactive church members. For the world will only know Christianity by love.

³² Laurence Richards, *Illustrated Bible Handbook*, (Nashville, TN: W. Publishing Group. 1997), 556.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

During a meeting of the church in September 2002, a selected sample of the church's membership was chosen to be pre-tested about their knowledge and attitudes of church membership retention and the "swinging door problem" that exists in some churches. Members of the selected pre-test represented some of the various ministries that were functioning within the context group. Those chosen represented four primary church ministries: (1) Men's Fellowship; (2) Youth Fellowship; (3) Women's Fellowship; (4) Administrative and Leadership.

The methodology consisted of five phases. The first phase consisted of a pretest survey, which examined the selected test group's knowledge and attitudes about terms associated with church membership retention. A Likert Scale questionnaire was given to the selected sample group. The Likert Scale was developed in conjunction with the context associates who were helpful in providing other perspectives pertaining to church membership questions. Once the questionnaire was completed, members of the sample group were given a time and location to meet to take the pretest examinations.¹

The second phase consisted of a training workshop, which was given to the selected test group. This training workshop was conducted to acquaint the test group members with specific knowledge and terms associated with church membership retention.

¹ See Appendix A.

This workshop was also implemented to assess the knowledge that members of the test group already possessed in reference to the “swinging door” problem.²

The third phase consisted of a posttest survey. The posttest survey was given immediately after the completion of the training workshop. Because one of the major objectives of the survey was to measure attitudinal changes, the posttest survey questions were the same as the pretest survey questions. Thus, the purpose of this testing was to reveal any attitudes changing between the pretest and posttest surveys.³

The fourth phase of the methodology for this model in ministry was a preaching series, which included sermons that focused on the theme “I Am My Brother's Keeper.” It was the researcher’s belief that preaching was the important issue in church membership retention for the Greater Vision Missionary Baptist Church. It was the purpose of the preaching series to prepare the congregation for what it takes to help assimilate, acclimate and activate church members into the body of Christ. Because the sermon, which is the word of God, is often the most valid reason that many church members leave, this series attempted to present theological themes that informed the members of the meaning of being a caring and loving community of baptized believers in Jesus Christ. These sermons were given for the purpose of educating and preparing the congregation for outreach ministry relating to the assimilation, reclamation, and activation of straying and inactive church members. In addition, the sermons presented church members with biblical theology that was meant to make them more sensitive, loving, and caring of fellow members of the body of Christ. Finally, the sermons sought to expose issues that could

² See Appendix B.

³ See Appendix C.

possibly lead members of the congregation to further explore this issue and to relate it to their own personal Christian witness.

Six sermons were preached as a means for preparing the congregation for this model in ministry. Those sermons served to raise the consciousness of members of the congregation to the “swinging door problem” which existed in the context church.⁴

The fifth phase of this model in ministry was the administration of a sermon series questionnaire to measure the impact of preaching that had been done. A Likert Scale was also used to measure the attitudes of the respondents. It should be noted that the questionnaire was developed in conjunction with context associates who provided valuable information concerning the value of the sermons that were preached.⁵

⁴ See Appendix D.

⁵ See Appendix E.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

Pretest Survey Results

The purpose of this model in ministry was to examine why the “swinging door problem” exists in some churches and to assess how the local church body could more effectively assimilate, reclaim and activate church members to retain them within the church’s membership. In order to perform this task, the researcher developed a model by implementing four stages. The first stage was a pretest examination. This pretest examined the selected group’s knowledge and attitudes concerning church membership retention issues. The first three questions centered on the respondent’s knowledge of the definition and use of the word, “assimilation.” Because the word assimilation means to “bring together” and to “integrate,” these questions were asked to see what the understanding and attitudes of the respondents were as it related to this term.

On the first question, which sought to assess the selected group’s knowledge of the term assimilation by asking, “I am able to define what the word assimilation means,” the responses were: 0% Strongly Agree, 48% Agree, 39% Strongly Disagree and 13% Disagree. Based upon these responses, over half of those surveyed indicated that they were not familiar with the word “assimilation.” It was initially the researcher’s thought that most of those questioned would have known the definition of “assimilation.”

Question Two stated, "I understand how the word assimilation relates to church membership retention in the body of Christ." The responses for this question were: 0% Strongly Agree, 44% Agree, 52% Strongly Disagree, and 4% Disagree.

Question Three stated, "I have a desire to assimilate our church members and also have ideas of how this can be done." The responses to this question were: 4% Strongly Agree, 44% Agree, 48% Disagree and 4% Strongly Disagree. The results of answers from questions one, two and three yielded similar percentages, which suggests that people must be familiar with concepts and terminology before they can clearly understand how specific terms relate to issues such as the "back door" problem.

Questions Four and Five dealt with the test group's attitudes concerning straying and inactive church members. Question Four stated, "most people leave their local church because they just aren't committed." The responses to this question were: 9% Strongly Agree, 48% Agree, 39% Disagree, and 4% Strongly Disagree. These results were consistent with the initial expectation of the interviewer.

Question Five stated, "There are some things our church can do to help retain members." The responses to this question were: 39% Strongly Agree, 48% Agree, 13% Disagree and 0% Strongly Disagree. These results indicated that the majority of those responding felt that the context church could do more to retain straying and inactive church members.

Questions Six through Nine attempted to secure information from the test group concerning attitudes about the context church's atmosphere of care and love for church members. Question six stated, "Our church is a loving and caring church." Responses to this question were: 22% Strongly Agree, 61% Agree, 17% Disagree and 0% Strongly

Disagree. The interviewer's conception was that less than 5% of those surveyed would disagree with this question, however the 17% that disagreed disproved this position.

Question Seven stated, "Our Pastor is a loving and caring and friendly pastor." Responses for this question were: 26% Strongly Agree, 70% Agree, 4% Disagree and 0% Strongly Disagree. These responses were expected and hoped for by the interviewer, as caring leadership has been one of the most important factors in helping to solve the "swinging door problem," according to materials researched for this project.

Question Eight was, "Our church can do more in the way of outreach and hospitality to help retain church membership." Responses for were: 34% Strongly Agree, 44% Agree, 13% Disagree and 9% Strongly Disagree. These results were contrary to the initial hunch of the interviewer who felt that more would have believed that the context church was currently doing much to help retain church members.

Question Nine was given to obtain information pertaining to how the respondents felt about their own attitudes concerning their ability to reach out to other church members. The question stated, "I consider myself to be an outgoing church member." The responses were: 30% Strongly Agree, 35% Agree, 26% Disagree and 9% Strongly Disagree. These responses were surprising to the interviewer, who had felt that the answers in the Agree categories would be much higher. These results indicate that 35% of the respondents overall do not consider themselves to be outgoing, which could imply that they do not feel comfortable with reaching out to other church members.

Question Ten was given to obtain information concerning the membership longevity of each of the selected group participants. This question stated, "I have been a member of Greater Vision Missionary Baptist Church for: 1-2 years, 3-4 years, 5-6 years

and 7 or more years. The answers listed were 22% 1-2 years, 13% 3-4 years, 13% 5-6 years and 52% 7 or more years.

Training Workshop

After the pretest examination was given, a church membership retention training session was presented to all members of the local church context including those who were among the selected group. The purpose of the training session was to acquaint church members with terms that related to the “swinging door problem” and to heighten their awareness concerning local church membership retention issues. A copy of the training materials can be found in Appendix B of this project. The selected group was then given an exam for the purpose of examining changes in knowledge and attitudes about the “swinging door problem” that exist in churches.

Results

On the first question, which sought to assess the selected group’s knowledge of the term assimilation, stated, “I am able to define what the word assimilation means.” The responses were: 39% Strongly Agree, 44% Agree, 17% Disagree and 0% Strongly Disagree. The responses from this question differed greatly from the pretest responses. Overall, the combined total of the Strongly Agree and Agree categories for this is 83% compared to the combined total of 48% for the pretest. This suggests that knowledge has changed favorably after the training session was given.

Question Two stated, “I understand how the word assimilation relates to church membership retention in the body of Christ.” The responses for this question were: 39% Strongly Agree, 44% Agree, 17% Disagree, and 0% Strongly Disagree. Overall, these

responses differed greatly from the pretest responses, as the total combined Strongly Agree and Agree answers were 83% compared to the pretest results, which was 44% for these same categories.

Question Three stated, "I have a desire to assimilate our church members and also have ideas of how this can be done." The responses for this question were: 27% Strongly Agree, 56% Agree, 17% Disagree and 0% Strongly Disagree. They differed from the pretest responses for this question as the total combined Strongly Agree and Agree answers were 82% compared to the pretest results of 48% for this same question.

Question Four states "Most people leave their local church because they just aren't committed." The responses to this question were: 13% Strongly Agree, 26% Agree, 39% Disagree and 22% Strongly Disagree.

Question Five stated, "There are some things our church can do to help retain members. The responses to this question were: 65% Strongly Agree, 31% Agree, 4% Agree, 0% Strongly Disagree.

Question Six stated, "Our church is a loving and caring church." The responses to this question were: 22% Strongly Agree, 65% Agree, 13% Disagree and 0% Strongly Disagree.

Question Seven stated, "Our Pastor is a loving and caring and friendly pastor. Responses were: 35% Strongly Agree, 61% Agree, 4% Disagree and 0% Strongly Disagree.

Question Eight was "Our church can do more in the way of outreach and hospitality to help retain church membership. Responses for this were: 52% Strongly Agree, 39% Agree, 9% Disagree, and 0% Strongly Disagree.

Question Nine stated, "I consider myself to be an outgoing church member." The responses were: 31% Strongly Agree. 34% Agree, 26%Disagree, and 9% Strongly Disagree.

Answers for question ten remained the same as the pretest answers.

The Sermon Series

The fourth phase of this model in ministry was a series of sermons preached under the theme, "Keeping the Sheep." This theme was used to stress the importance of caring for the sheep of Christ, who are those who have become both universal and local church members. This theme also suggests that there is danger whenever a sheep wanders off or becomes lost. Thus, the theme, "Keeping the Sheep," focuses on issues concerning church membership care, love and retention. Each sermon addressed theological issues pertaining to the responsibility of Christians to watch over and care for one another. It was thought that the sermons would heighten the sense of awareness for straying members among the listeners and, as a result, members would become concerned and reach out to help those who somehow felt unattached or left out of the mainstream of the local church membership. A total of six sermons were preached relating to the theme.

The first sermon was entitled "How to Keep the Sheep" from Luke 15:4-7. The focus of this sermon was to inform the hearers that, while most churches spend time evangelizing to win souls to Christ, some churches don't spend equal time trying to keep those who have become church members committed, assimilated and involved in the church. As a result, some church members will begin to stray away from the church fold. The aim of this sermon was to make the hearers aware of reasons why sheep may leave the fold. It also acquainted them with some signs that are associated with church

membership dropout, in hope that they would become more sensitized to straying church members in order to help reach out to this specific group of members. A copy of this sermon can be found in Appendix D.

The second sermon was entitled "Let's Sweep the House." The scriptural reference for this sermon was Luke 15:8-10. This message centered on a parable that Jesus told about a woman who lost one of her precious coins. In order to find the coin, the woman swept the whole house. She was not satisfied that she still had many coins left, for she considered the one lost coin also to be valuable. So, she swept the house until she found the coin. A copy of this sermon can be found in Appendix. D.

The third sermon was entitled "There is No Place Like Home," taken from Luke 15:11-32. A secondary title for this work was "The Door of The Church Is Open." Using two characters, the son and the father, in the parable of the prodigal son, this sermon focused on what the attitudes of the flock should be once a sheep who has left the fold on his own accord (the son) decides to return to the fold (home). A major observation of this sermon is that, unlike the other two parables, this text involved those who have voluntarily left the fold. They are not just lost, or misplaced, but they left on their own free will. This sermon addressed some reasons why people voluntarily leave the fold and our attitudes towards them. A copy of this sermon can be found in the Appendix D.

The fourth sermon is entitled "Runaway Child Running Wild, Go Back Home Where You Belong," from Luke 15:11-24. Unlike the other sermons, this message seeks to reach those church members who have left for selfish reasons or some other negative reason on their own part. It also focuses on the story of the prodigal son, but it seeks to identify some ungodly reasons why some may leave the fold (home). A copy of this sermon can be found in the Appendix D.

The fifth sermon was entitled “Go and Do Likewise” from Luke 10:30-37. The message centered on Jesus’ parable of the “Good Samaritan,” who helped a man who was robbed and beaten and left for dead. The focus of this message was to remind Christian listeners that Christ expects us to give help where it is needed, including to those who are members of the household of faith. A copy of this sermon can be found in Appendix D.

The sixth sermon was entitled “The Lord Needs Help,” from Matthew 9:37-38. This sermon focused on the importance for Christians to witness for Christ inside and outside of the church walls. A copy of this sermon can be found in Appendix D.

The Survey Questionnaire

The fifth phase of this model in ministry was the administration of a questionnaire to measure the impact of the preaching series. A Likert Scale was also used to measure attitude, which was desired by the researcher. The Likert Scale was helpful because it allowed the respondents to express their opinions by simply answering Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree or Strongly Disagree to the questions that were asked. It should be noted that the questionnaire was developed in conjunction with context associates who provided valuable information as laypersons concerning the value of the sermons that were preached. The results of the questionnaires are as follows.

The first question was designed to know how much of the sermon series each person had attended. The question read, “the number of sermons I have heard of the preaching series is: a) 6 sermons, b) 5 sermons, c) 4 sermons, d) 3 sermons, e) 1-2 sermons. The answers received were: 90% - 6 sermons, 10% - 5 sermons and 0% for each of the remaining categories. These results show that a total of 100% of those questioned heard the majority of the six sermons.

The remainder of questions assessed the attitudes about caring for others before and after hearing the sermons. The second question stated: "The preaching series has made me more aware of the importance of a Christians responsibility to watch over and care for each other. The results were: 35% Strongly Agree, 60% Agree, 5% Disagree, and 0% Strongly Disagree. The third question was, "Preaching has broadened my awareness concerning the 'Swinging Door Problem' that exists within churches." The results were: 40% Strongly Agree, 55% Agree, 5% Disagree and 0% Strongly Disagree.

The fourth question was "The messages that have been preached concerning 'Let's keep The Sheep' have convinced me that the body of Christ needs to do more to reach out to wayward, straying and lost members." The results were: 40% Strongly Agree, 55% Agree, 5% Disagree, and 0% Strongly Disagree.

The fifth question was "The sermon series has caused me to understand core concerns and the value of every member of the body of Christ." The results were: 55% Strongly Agree, 40% Agree, 5% Disagree and 0% Strongly Disagree.

The sixth question stated, "The sermons have enhanced my understanding of the biblical relationship between members who are in the body of Christ." The results were: 60% Strongly Agree, 35% Agree, 5% Disagree, and 0% Strongly Disagree.

The seventh question was, "The sermon series has addressed issues of unity and togetherness that should be embraced by all who are of the body of Christ." The results were: 60% Strongly Agree, 35% Agree, 5% Disagree and 0% Strongly Disagree.

The eighth question was, "The sermon series has caused me to become more caring about my Christian brothers and sisters in our church." The results were: 40% Strongly Agree, 55% Agree, 3% Disagree, 2% Strongly Disagree.

The ninth question was, “The sermon series has moved me from being little concerned to very concerned about the ‘swinging door problem.’” The results were: 45% Strongly Agree, 50% Agree, 5% Disagree, and 0% Strongly Disagree.

The tenth question was, “The sermon series has motivated me to become involved in witnessing and assisting those who have strayed or left the church.” The results were: 45% Strongly Agree, 45% Agree, 10% Disagree and 0% Strongly Disagree.

The responses to questions Two and Three confirmed the researcher’s hunch that preaching about the care and responsibility would make members more aware of the “swinging door problem” that exists in churches. Over 95% of those responding said they were now more aware of this problem.

The responses to questions Four, Five and Six assessed the respondent’s growth in understanding about the “swinging door problem.” This also confirmed the researcher’s hypothesis that preaching could be used as a tool not only for awareness of a problem, but also to help one to grow in his/her understanding of a problem. Over 95% of the respondents showed that they had grown in their understanding of the “swinging door problem.”

Questions Seven, through Ten assessed if the respondents were motivated to do something about the “swinging door problem.” As the researcher had expected, the vast majority (over 90%) of those responding showed that they were motivated to help with this problem.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTIONS, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love in honor preferring one another, Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord: Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Be of the same mind one toward another ¹

Given this scripture, it has become the pastor's and congregation's vision to broaden our outreach ministry to straying church members in order to keep them as church members at the Greater Vision Baptist Church.

Because of the research, tests, preaching and praying that this project has included, many members are now more aware, and more dedicated to becoming involved in helping all Greater Vision Members become more effectively assimilated, reclaimed, and activated within our local church congregation. As a result, plans are being made to take a proactive step in the slowing down of the "swinging door" at Greater Vision. Some of the things that the church will implement relative to this project are mentioned below:

1. Prayer Partner Pals - All current church members will be assigned to become a friend and prayer partner to at least one other member of the church. The church roster will serve as an instrument to be reviewed by the church leadership to make these assignments.

¹ Holy Bible, Romans 12:10-16 KJV

2. Tribes of Vision - the pastor will assign members of his executive staff, along with deacons, deaconesses and others of his appointment to be responsible for the oversight of different quadrants of the church population. For example, if the church has a total of 200 members, five teams will be responsible for the watch care of 40 church members each. The Tribe of Visions members will be responsible for keeping up with their member's special days and special concerns. They will also be responsible for reporting serious concerns to the pastor so that he may provide the needed response and care to members with that need.
3. An Assimilation Ministry - Plans are being made to create a team of members who are trained in hospitality and knowledge to help new members become involved in the ministries at Greater Vision Missionary Baptist Church. Currently, the search is on to find a part-time paid employee to lead this thrust. The Assimilation Team would be responsible for introducing new members to the congregation; keeping track of members' attendance and activity; and conducting activities that will help members to assess their own talents and skills that may be used in the church.

These are only a few things that will be implemented at Greater Vision in the near future to deal with the "swinging door problem." Now that the church family has been made aware of the problem, they have become interested in providing ideas for solutions. Their new attitudes are much different than this researcher expected. It was initially believed that people just did not care about straying and disengaged church members. The people within the context have proved this idea wrong. In fact, the real issue was never whether church members cared, but rather whether church members were aware that such a problem truly existed.

As Greater Vision Missionary Baptist Church has just celebrated its ninth Church Anniversary, we are looking forward to the fellowshipping of new church members into the body of Christ. But, just as importantly, our new emphasis will also be to watch over and care for those who are already members of our great Church. With this new attitude, we are confident that the springs on the old “swinging doors” will become rusted and refuse to swing any longer. With God's help, we know that this can be come a reality.

APPENDIX A
PRETEST SURVEY RESULTS

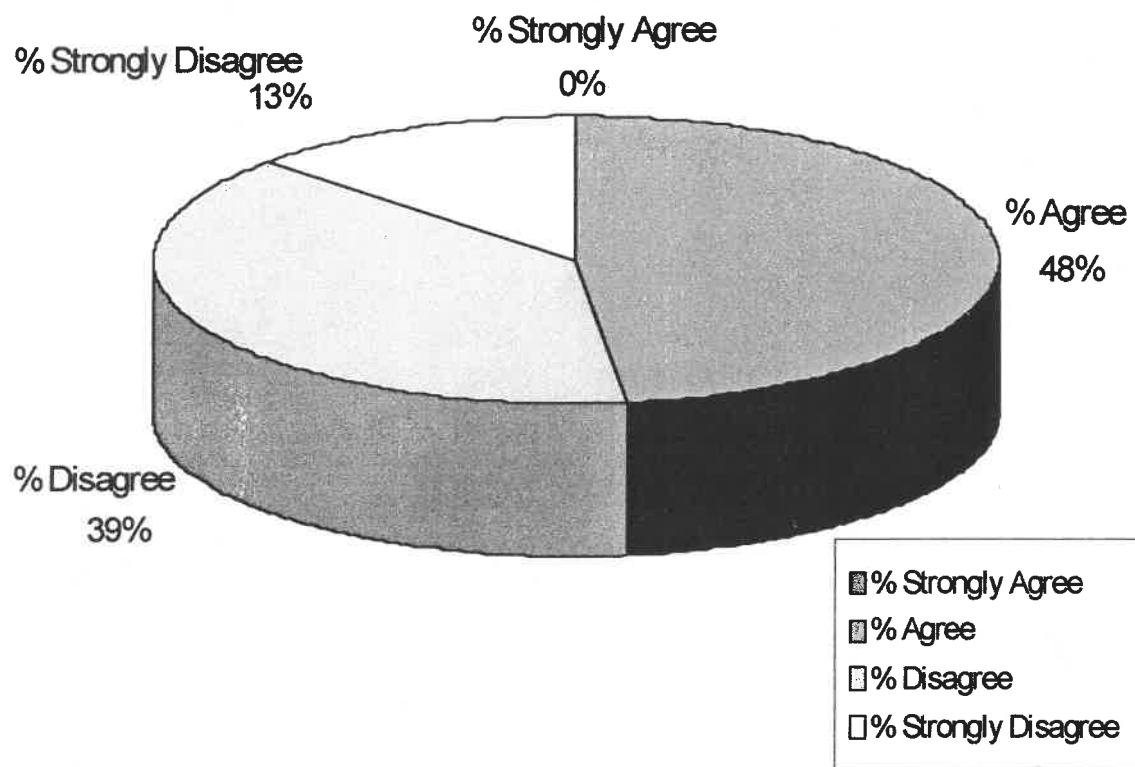
Doctoral Project: Membership Retention Pre-Test Survey

Total Response	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 5	Q 6	Q 7	Q 8	Q 9	Q 10
Strongly Agree	0	0	1	2	9	5	6	8	7	1-2: 5
% Strongly Agree	0	0	4	9	39	22	26	34	31	22
Agree	11	10	10	11	11	14	16	10	8	3-4: 3
% Agree	48	44	44	48	48	61	70	44	35	13
Disagree	9	12	11	9	3	4	1	3	6	5-6: 3
% Disagree	39	52	48	39	13	17	4	13	26	13
Strongly Disagree	3	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	2	7+: 12
% Strongly Disagree	13	4	4	4	0	0	0	9	9	52

Total Response	Q 11	Q 12	Q 13	Q 14	Q 15	Q 16	Q 17	Q 18	Q 19	Q 20
Strongly Agree	4	4	10	5	5	3	5	5	5	15
% Strongly Agree	17	17	44	22	22	13	22	22	22	65
Agree	10	10	8	8	8	7	10	10	14	6
% Agree	44	44	35	35	35	30	44	44	61	26
Disagree	6	6	4	7	4	8	4	4	4	2
% Disagree	26	26	17	30	17	35	17	17	17	9
Strongly Disagree	3	3	1	3	6	5	4	4	0	0
% Strongly Disagree	13	13	4	13	26	22	17	17	0	0

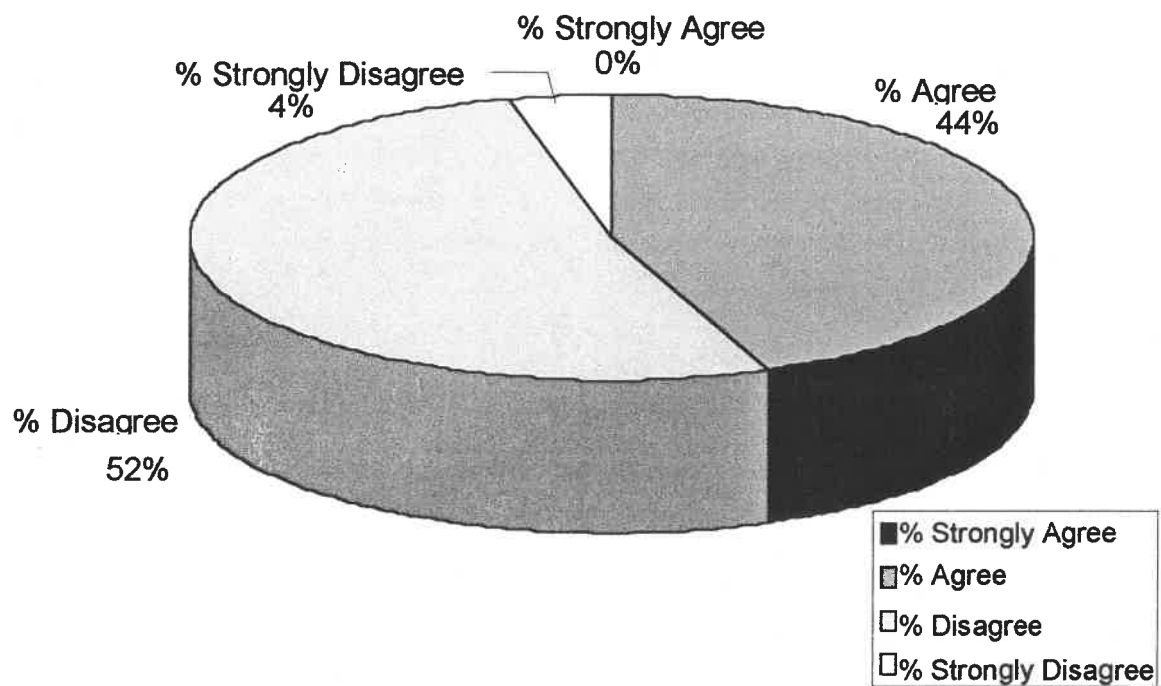
1. I am able to define what the word assimilation means.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 1



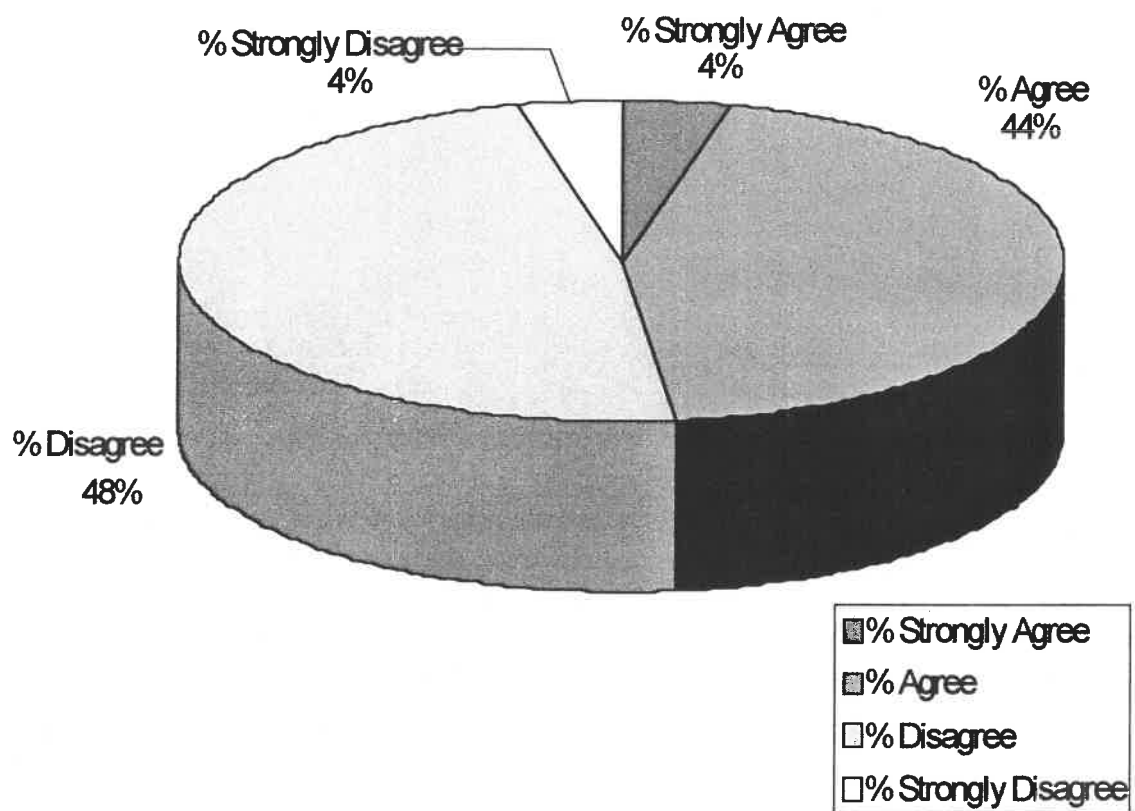
2. I understand how the word assimilation relates to church membership retention in the body of Christ.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 2



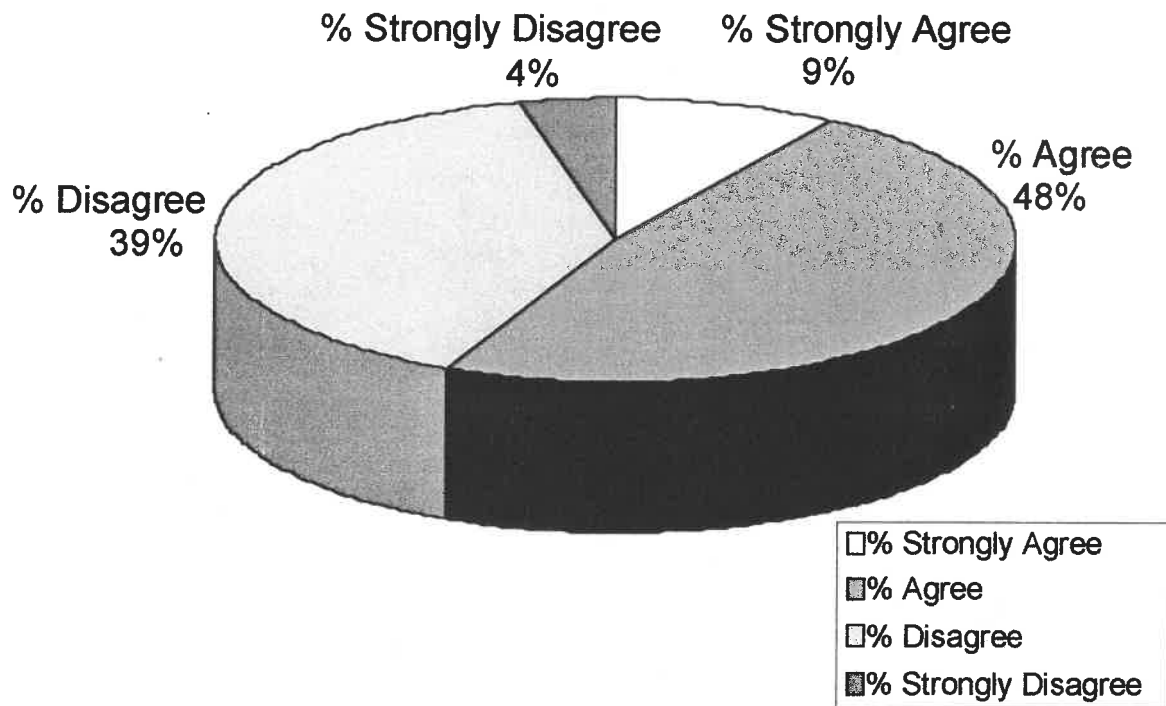
3. I have a desire to assimilate our church members and also have some ideas of how that can be done.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 3



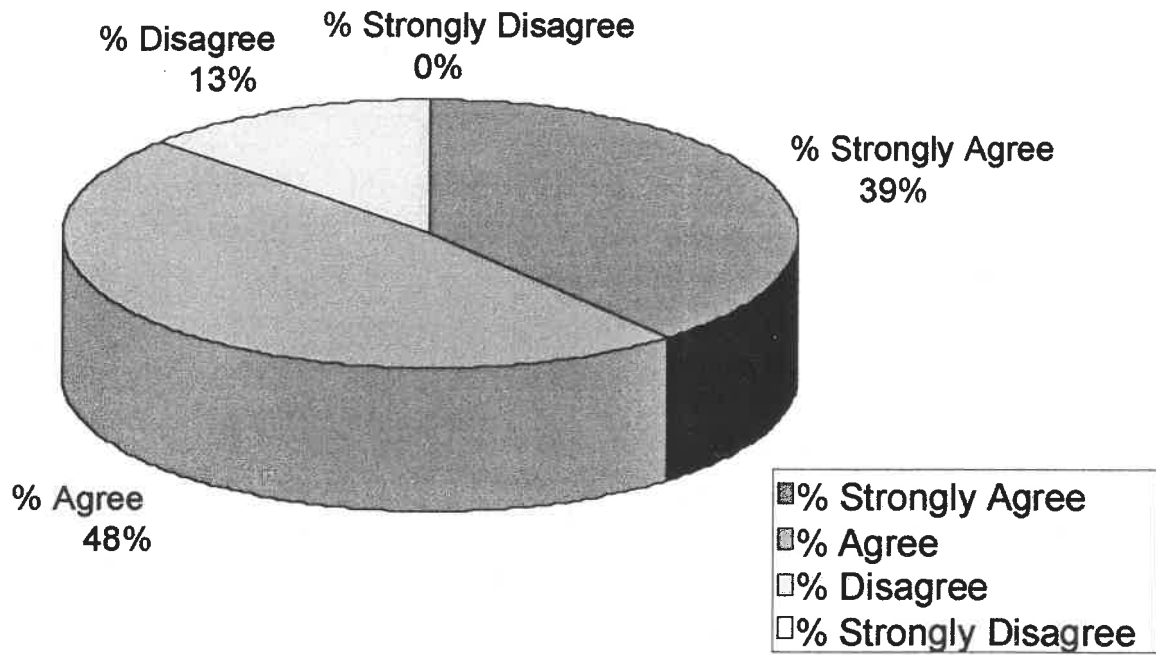
4. Most people leave their local church because they just aren't committed.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 4



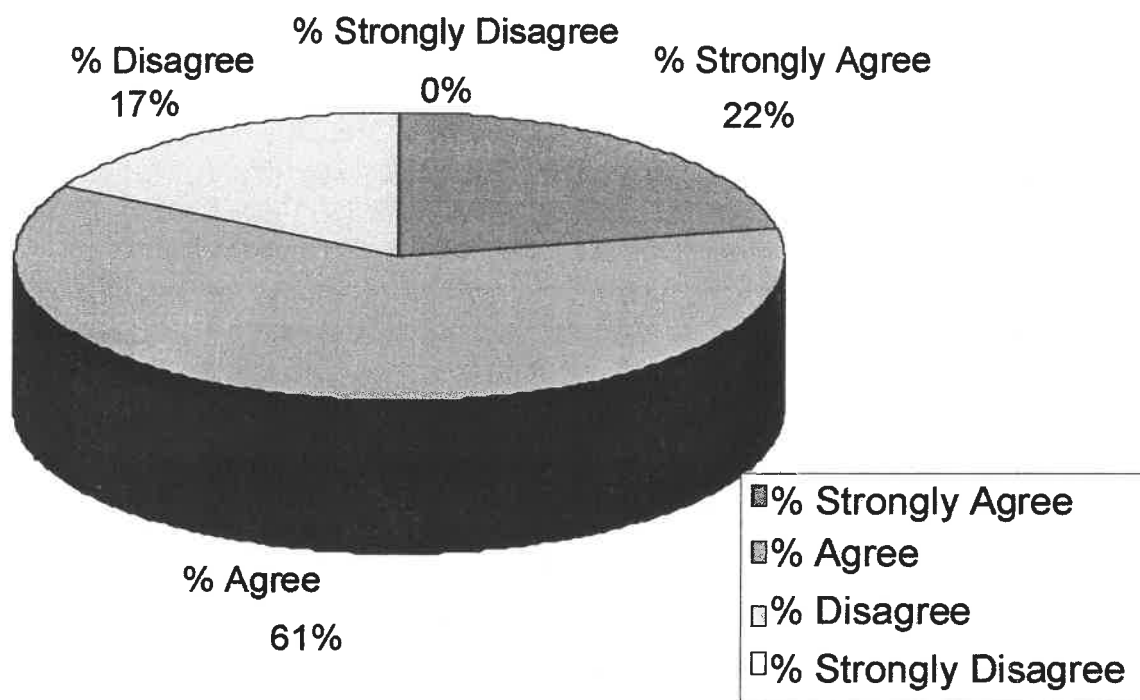
5. There are some things our church can do to help retain members.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 5



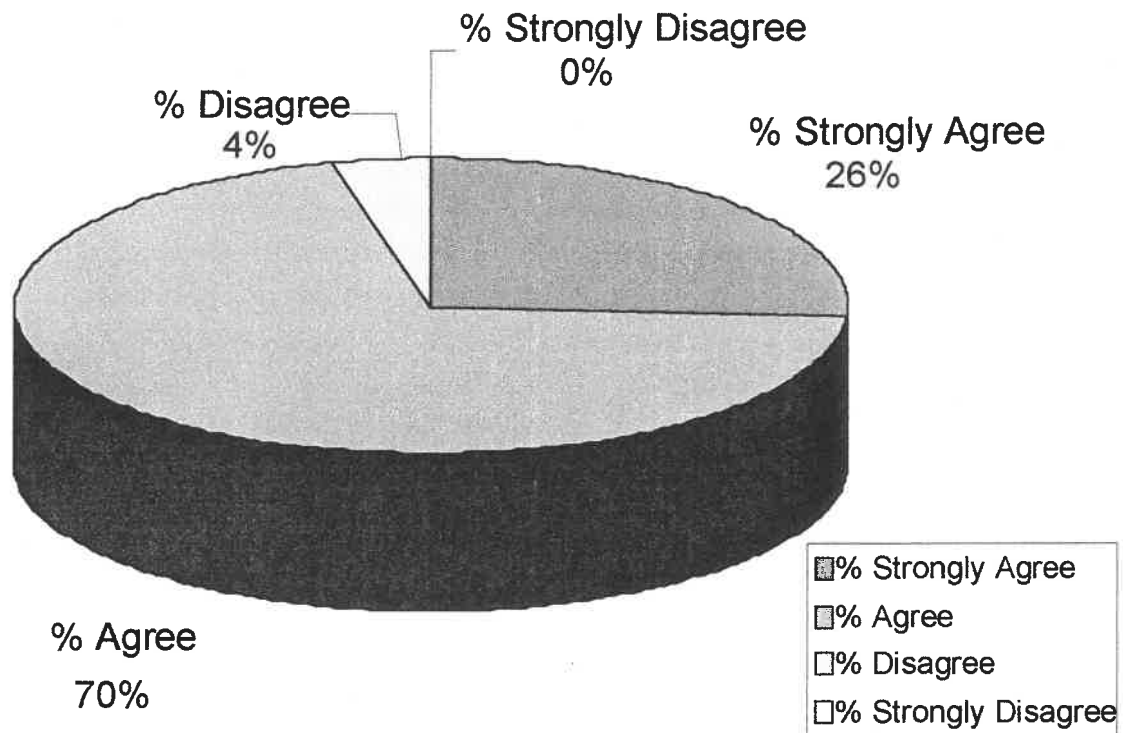
6. Our church is a loving and caring church.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 6



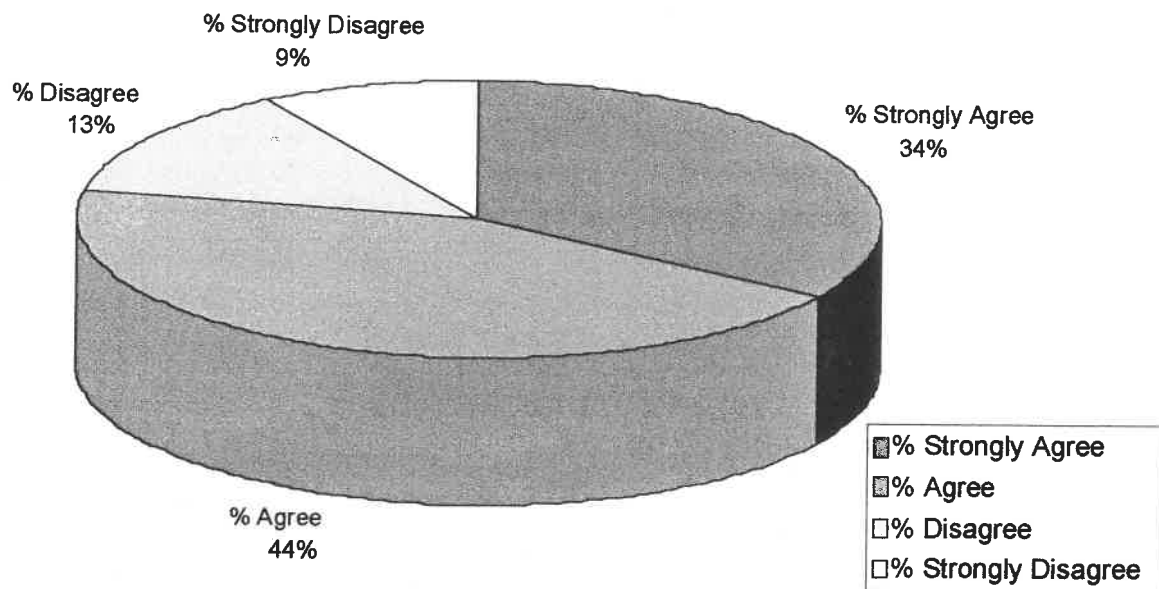
7. Our pastor is a loving, caring, and friendly pastor.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 7



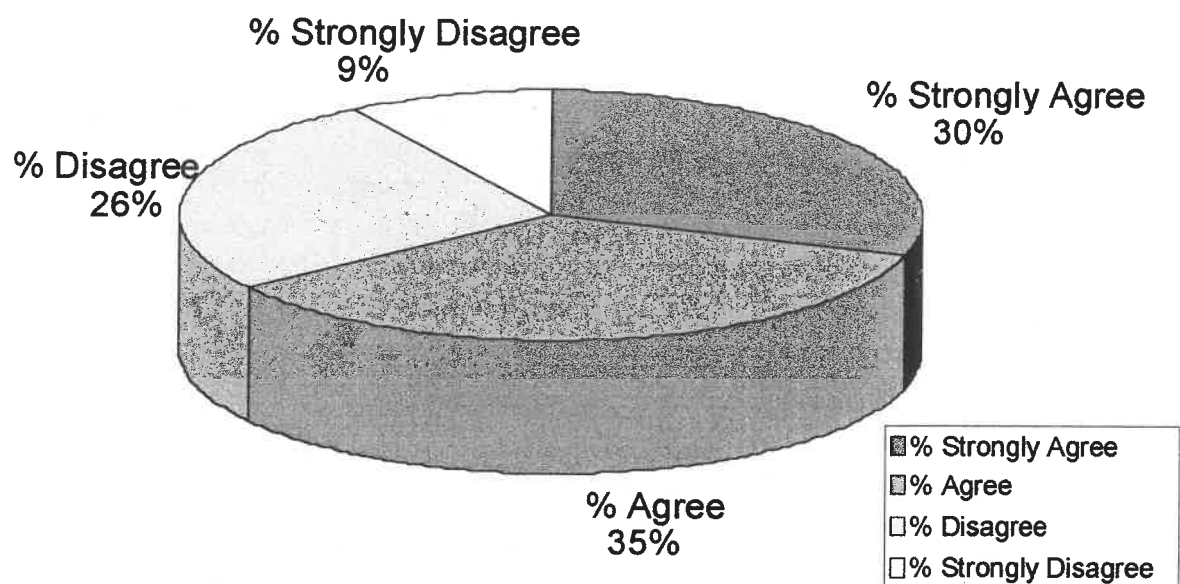
8. Our church can do more in the way of outreach and hospitality to help retain church membership.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 8



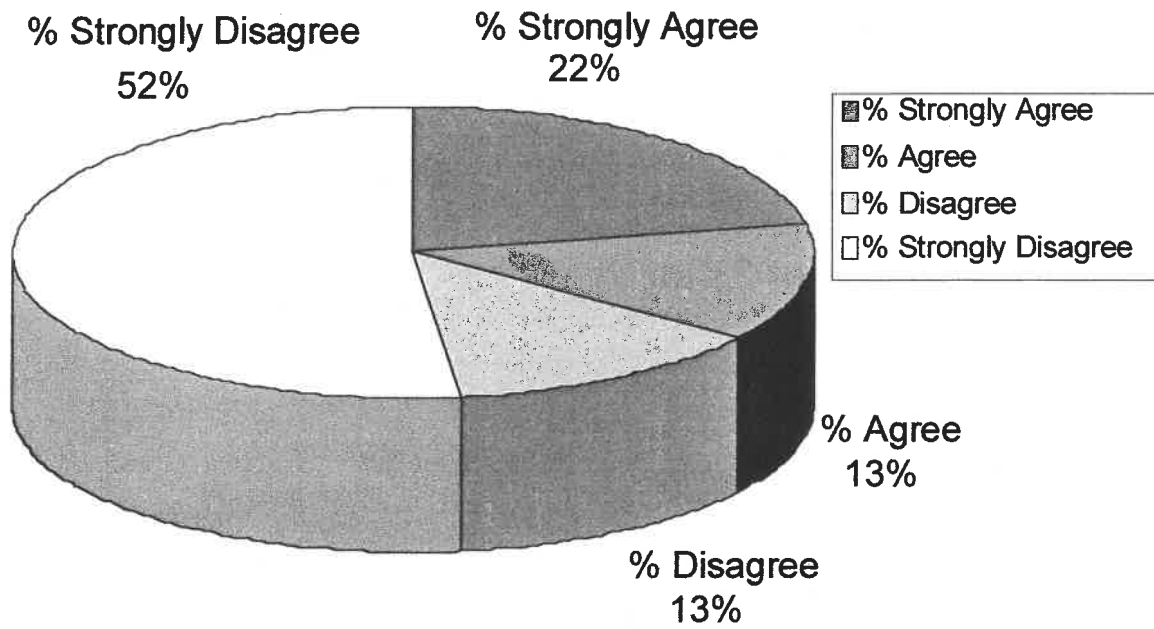
9. I consider myself to be an outgoing church member.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 9



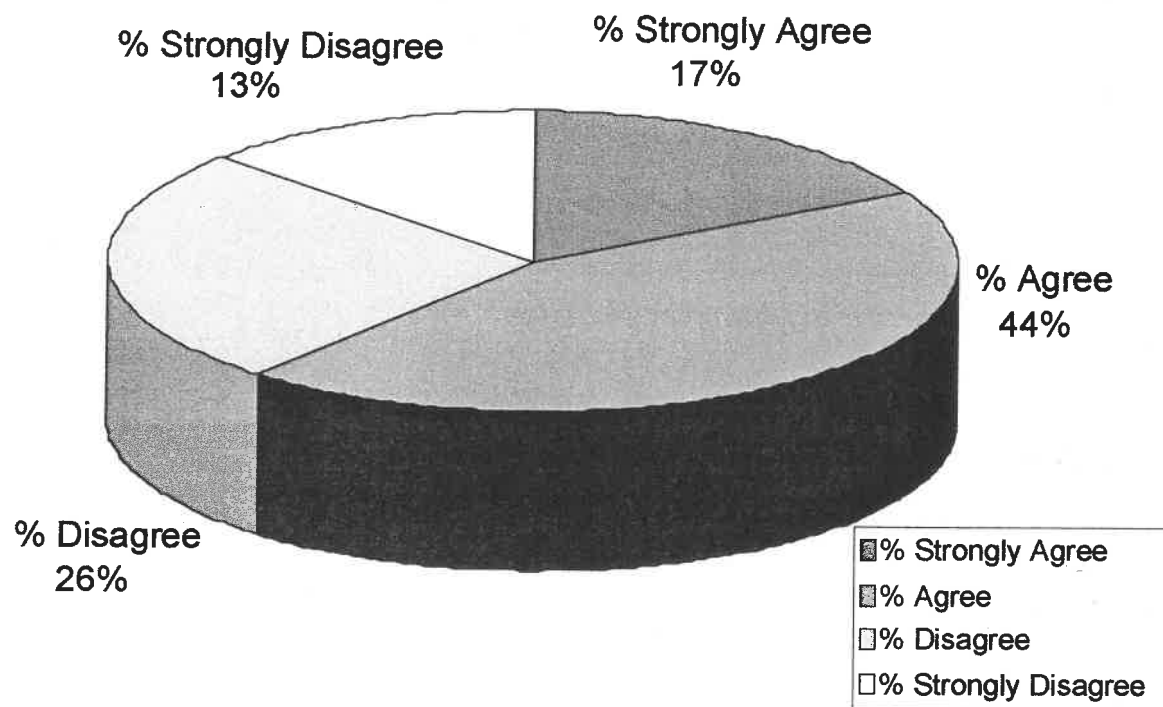
10. I consider myself to be an outgoing church member.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 10



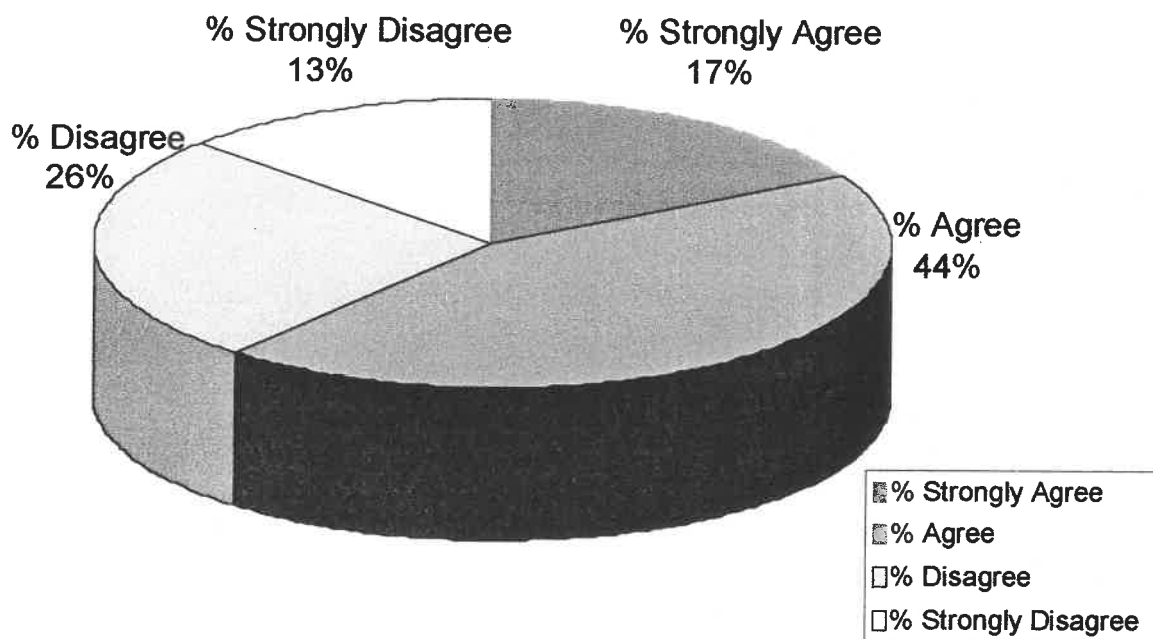
11. It is every Christian's responsibility to help maintain church membership.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 11



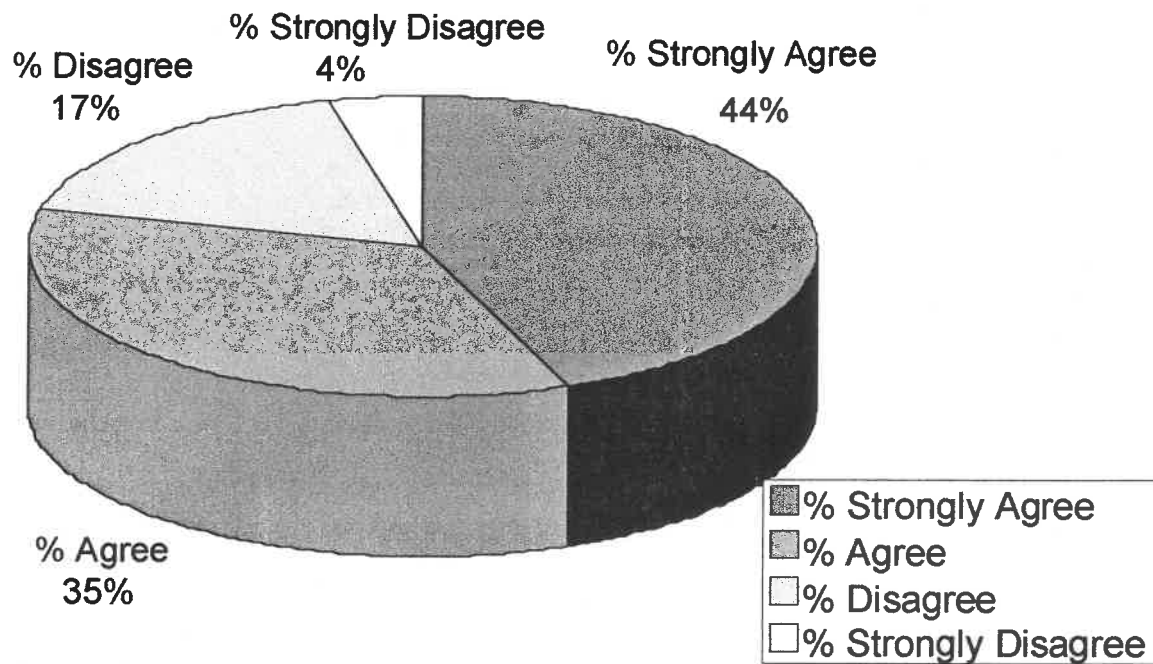
12. I know and understand the definition of assimilation and how it relates to church membership retention.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 12



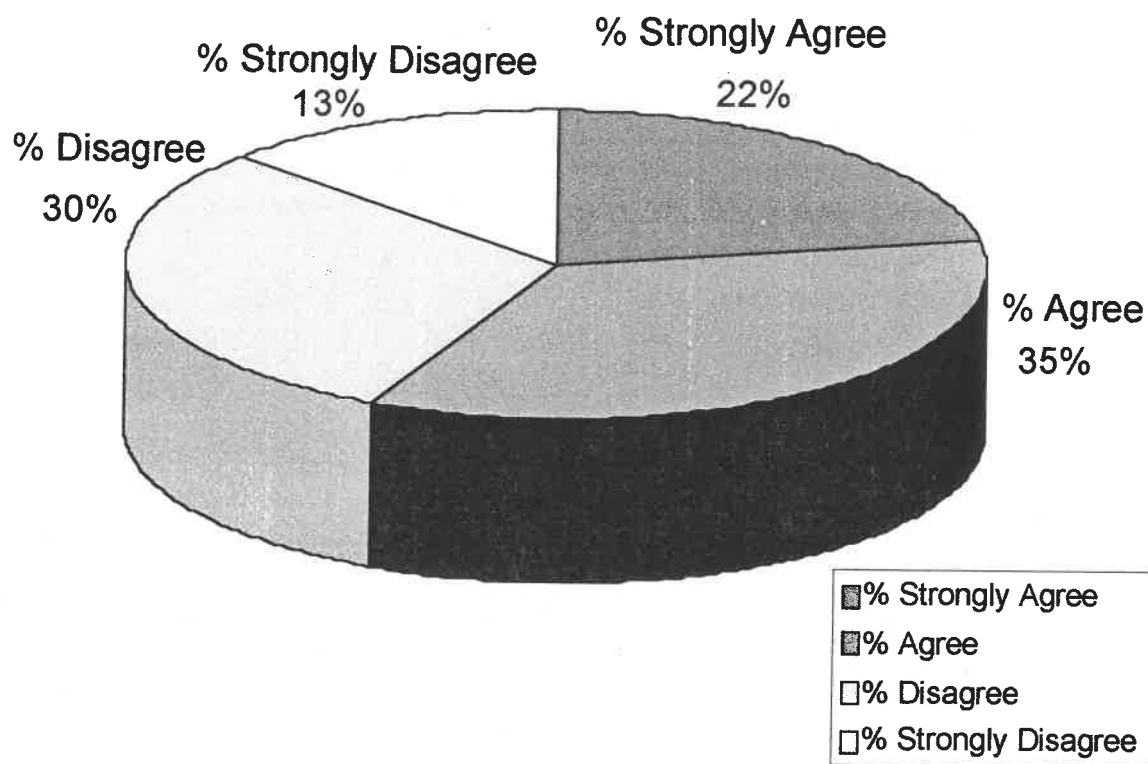
13. It is very important for all church members to become active in the local church.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 13



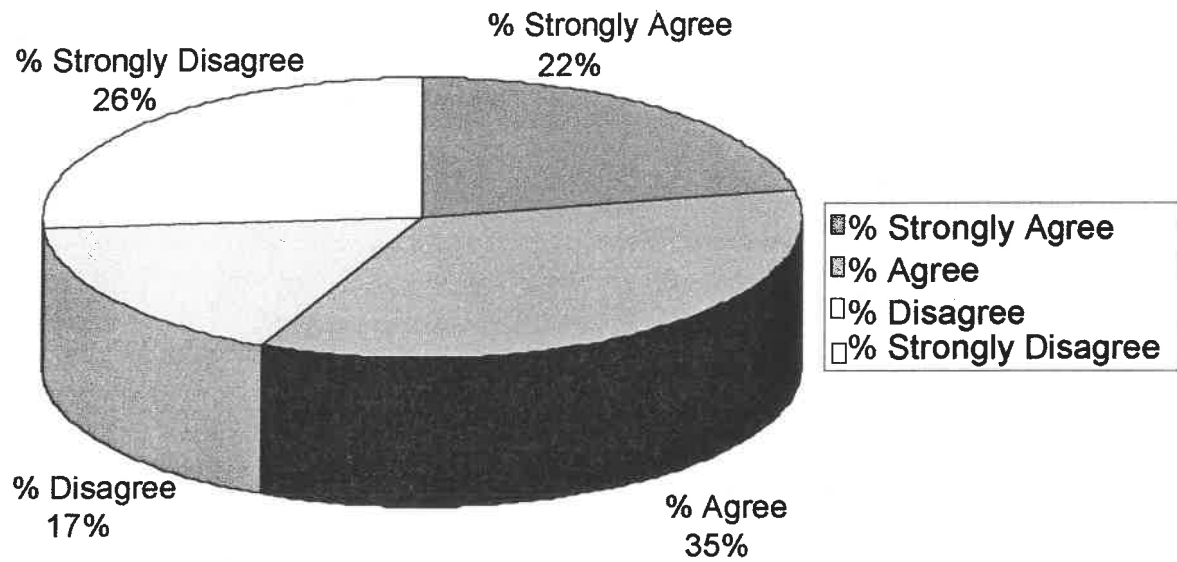
14. I am able to define the term Universal Church and Local Church and the relationship between both.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 14



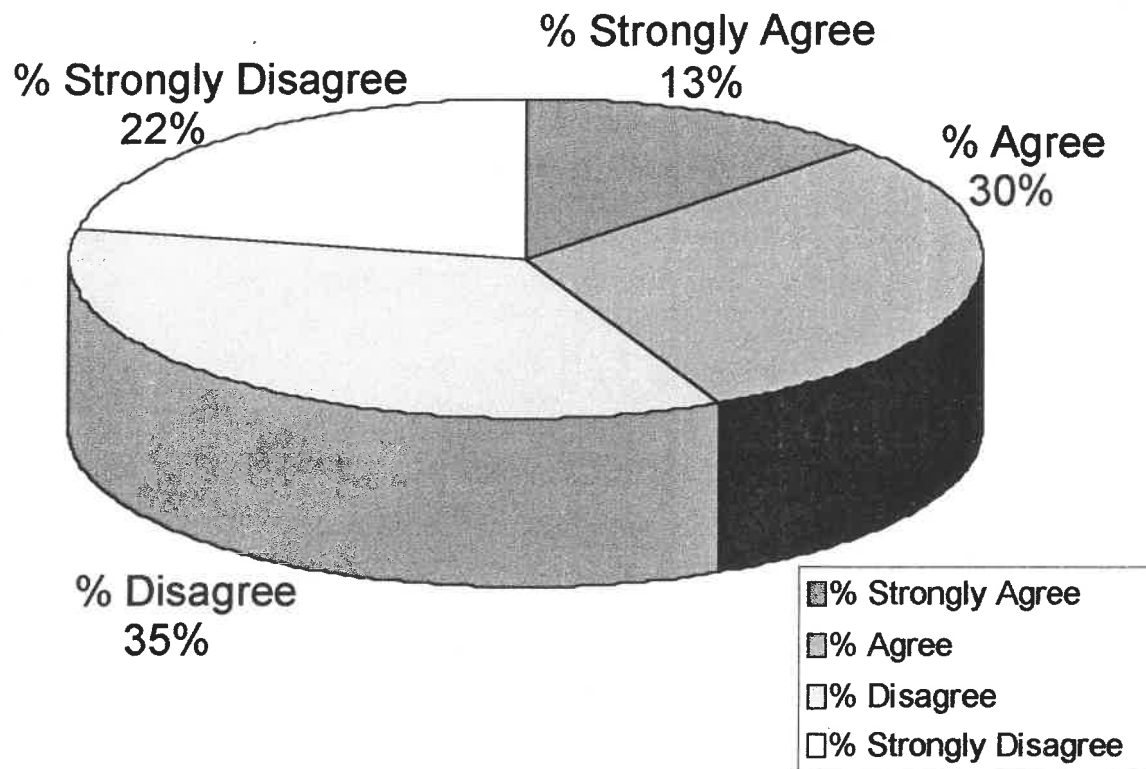
15. I understand what is meant by the church “Swinging Door” problem”.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 15



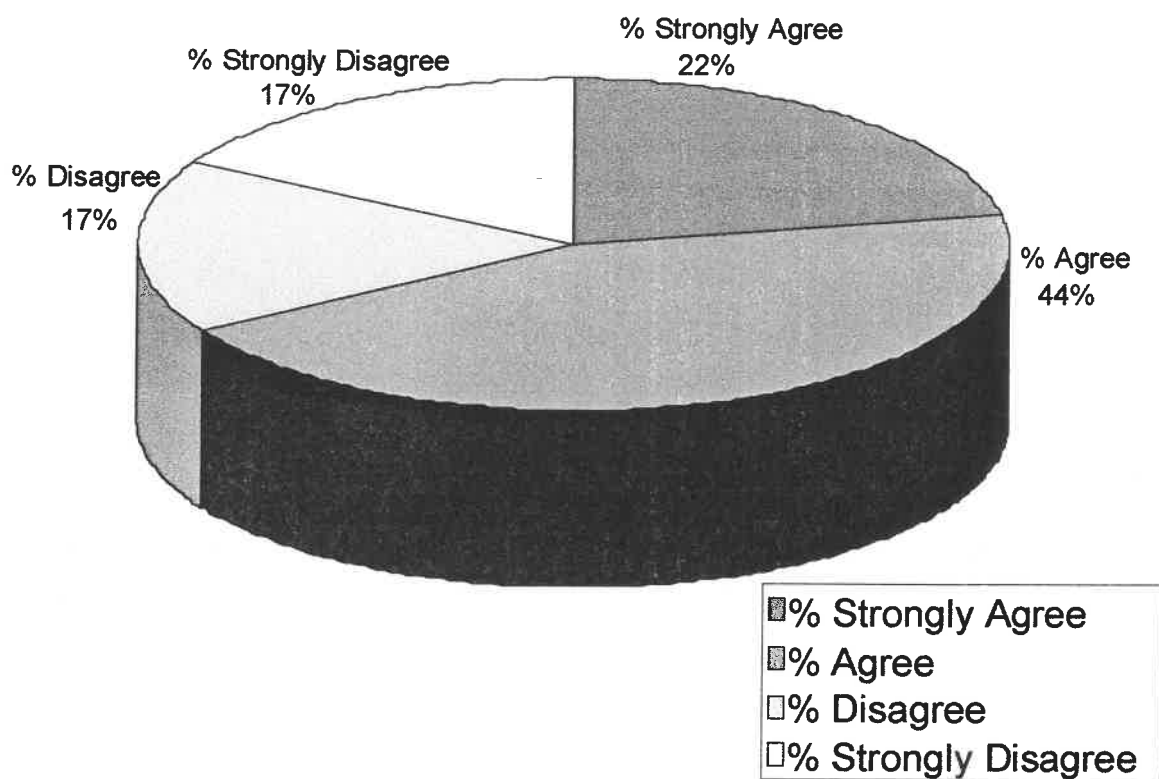
16. It is the Pastor's responsibility to solve the "Swinging Door" problem.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 16



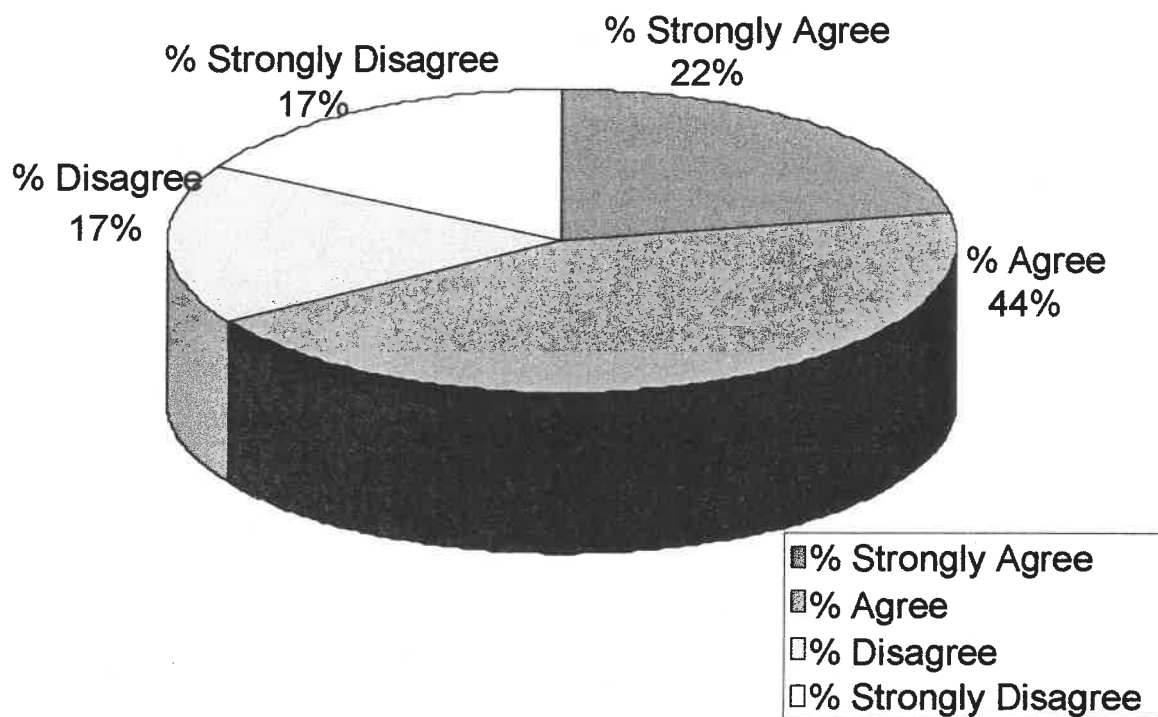
17. I understand what is meant to “retain” church members.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 17



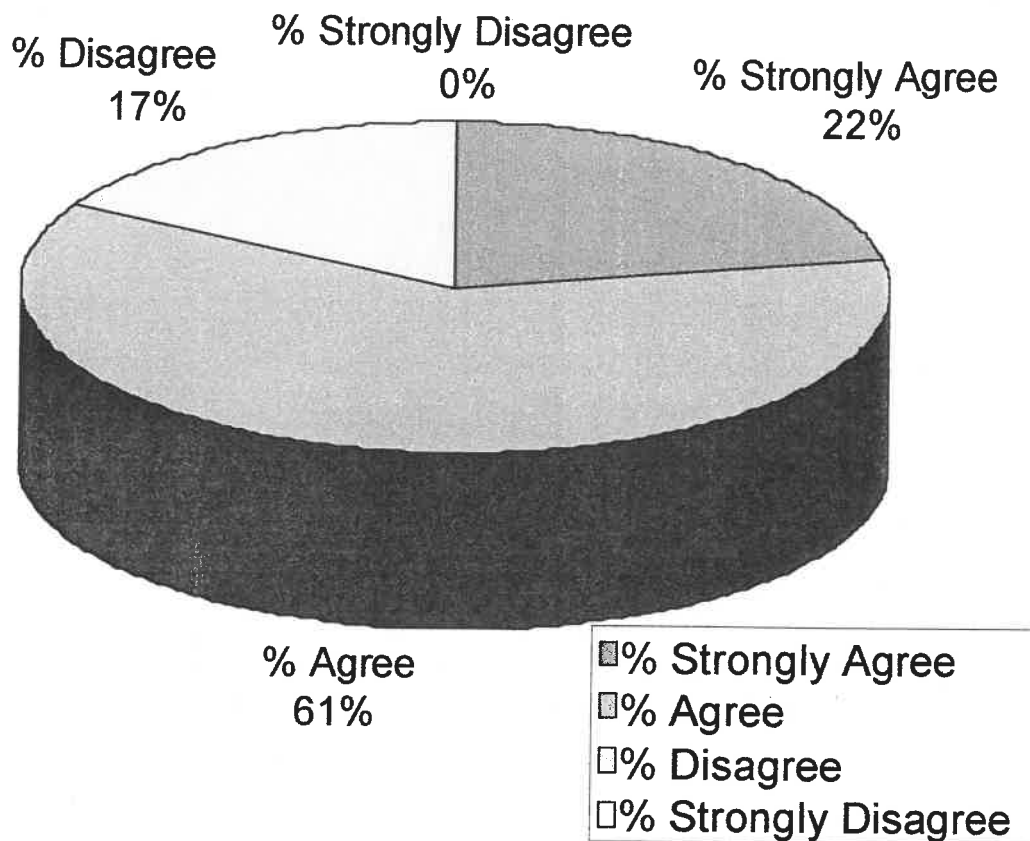
18. I believe that a swinging door problem exist within our church.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 18



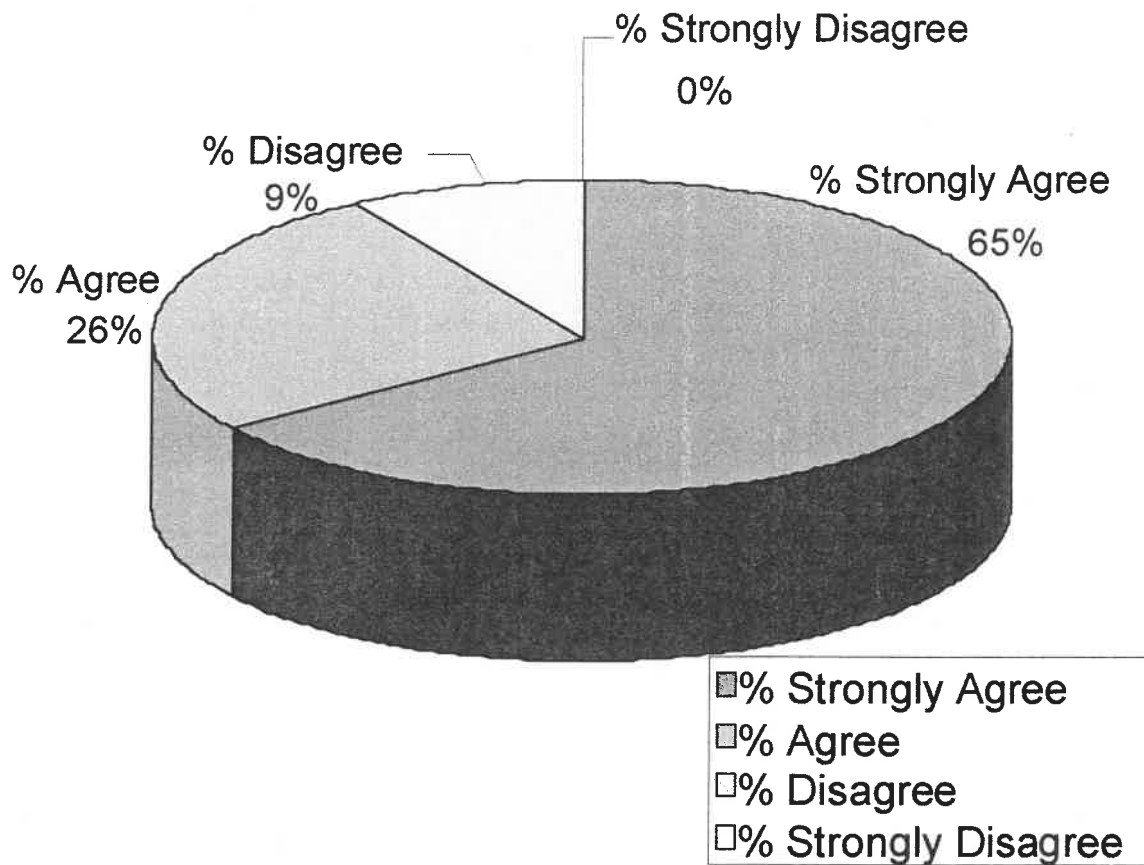
19. I would like to do more on my part to help slow down or solve the church's "swinging door" problem.

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 19



20. I would like to learn more through teaching and preaching concerning how to maintain church membership and how to close the "swinging door."

PRE-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 20



APPENDIX B
TRAINING WORKSHOP

“MY BROTHER AND SISTER’S KEEPER”

**A TRAINING WORKSHOP FOR
GREATER VISION BAPTIST CHURCH
TO BRING ABOUT EDUCATION
AND AWARENESS OF THE
“SWINGING DOOR PROBLEM”**

DATE

MARVIN L. MILLER, SR., PASTOR

TRAINING SESSION NUMBER ONE

Terms and Definitions

1. What Is Meant By “Universal Church?”

The Universal Church consists of all persons who are baptized believers in Jesus Christ. The Universal Church is not a building or location, but it is the people who have confessed a hope in Christ and who have made them their Lord and Savior. This means that one can be a member of the Universal Church regardless of the place where they choose to worship or regardless of what denomination in which they may belong.

2. What Is Meant By “Local Church?”

The local church consists of a group of baptized believers who are a part of the Universal Church. Members of Greater Vision MBC are a part of the Universal Church, however, it is also a local church because we have come together in a specific location to worship, evangelize, fellowship, discipleship and do ministry for Christ using a specific location as a meeting place and as an opportunity to witness within the church context and its community.

3. What Characterizes The Local Church?

If we use the church as seen in the book of Acts, we will find that church members had all things in common. They shared what they had. They watched over one another. They fellowshiped frequently. They demonstrated the love of Christ, first to each other, then to others. More than any other characteristics, those on the outside of the church recognized Christians because of their unity and love.

4. What Is “Assimilation? How Does It Relate To Church Membership Retention?”

Webster’s Dictionary defines the word “assimilation” as to absorb into the system; to take in and nourish; or to absorb into cultural tradition. The term “assimilation” is important as it relates to church membership retention because it is the every church’s responsibility to absorb its members into the body of Christ. The church should also nourish each member and make him/her feel that they belong in the body of Christ. If the congregation does not seek to integrate, or assimilate all, some of those who feel that they have not been absorbed into mainstream membership may leave the church almost as quickly as they have joined.

5. What Is “Reclamation?” How Does It Relate To Church Membership Retention?

Webster’s Dictionary defines the word “reclamation as: to reclaim; to reform; or to rehabilitate. Some people have left the church, while others feel disenchanting as members of the church. They feel left out or as if they don’t really belong. Some of these members have lost their excitement and zeal; thus, they see membership in the local church as boring, insipid and mundane. In order to reach such persons, the church must seek to reclaim, reform and to rehabilitate these members back into the fellowship as valuable church members.

6. What Is “Activation?” How Does It Relate To Church Membership Retention? How Does It Relate To Church Membership Retention?

The dictionary defines the word “activation” as bringing into movement; to set into action; to be productive; to put on active duty or to give activity. If members are going to be retained in the church, they will need to be active. Activity gives members a sense of

ownership and responsibility. Activity also points to purpose and it gives members direction as to what it is they are to do as part of the body of Christ. As church members are active, they find their niche, meaning their place in church work.

TRAINING SESSION NUMBER TWO

“The Swinging Door”

1. The “Swinging Door Problem” How Does It Relate To Membership Retention?

The “Swinging Door Problem” is a situation where church members leave their local churches almost as soon as they have joined

2. Why Does The “Swinging Door Problem” Exist?

. There are various reasons why this may happen. The person leaving or the lack of care or awareness of the problem may have contributed some by church leadership and/or church members. Some reasons that members who have left churches have given are: the feeling of not belonging; Church Conflict; there’s nothing to do; more important priorities; unfriendly church members; boredom; lack of commitment; irrelevant messages and worship; family problems; personal problems the generation gap; fallen life styles; and a host of other reasons.

3. Why Should We Be Concerned About The “Swinging Door Problem?”

We should be concerned about this problem because it causes us to lose church members in our local congregation. It also can stifle those members church growth, as they need to mature in the word of God, the fellowship of the saints, and the work of the church. Rick Warren states it best as he says:

As Christians we're called to belong, not just to believe. We are not meant to live lone ranger lives; instead, we are to belong to Christ's family and to be members of his body. Baptism is not only a symbol of salvation' it is a symbol of fellowship. It not only symbolized our new life in Christ it visualizes a person's incorporation into the body of Christ. It says to the world that this new member is now one of us. In essence, this connotes that when new believers are baptized; they should be welcomed into the fellowship of the family of God, knowing that they are a part of the body of Christ.

It is our Christian responsibility to be concerned about our straying sisters and brothers.

TRAINING SESSION NUMBER THREE

Membership Growth and Decline

1. Why Do Some Congregations Grow While Others Decline?

Church growth and retention research and studies have concluded that some of the reasons why some churches grow while other experience decline in membership are as follow:

- Churches that grow have a greater commitment of members, while churches that experience constant decline do not. Members of growing and stable congregations exhibit greater institutional commitment than congregations that are declining.
- Growing congregations emphasize an outreach or outward orientation and make outreach and evangelism a responsibility of all of the members, while churches that experience constant decline do not.
- Newer congregations are better able to integrate new members more readily than older congregations and are less likely to grow than younger ones.
- Congregation based conflict, has a direct correlation with congregational membership decline.
- Larger Suburban congregations with membership of more than 500 are more effected by community context, demography and social-economical impact than that of smaller urban & rural churches.
- Correlation of growth and retention vary by local and church type. Smaller churches and churches in rural areas are less effected by their contexts and by institutional change. They experience less dramatic changes in population than metropolitan areas.
- Denominational affiliations are a significant correlation of growth, over and above the action taken by a local church. Religious denominations either encourage or discourage growth.
- Programmatic efforts to achieve growth often results in more membership activity than substantial growth.

2. What Strategies Can Be Used To Help Retain Church Members?

There are many strategies that have been developed to help deal with church membership retention and the “swinging door problem.” Some of them are:

- *Developing Meaningful Friendships* –Members are more likely to stay at a church where they have developed friendships. People, especially new church members need church friends in order to feel a sense of belonging.
- *Forming Relationships Prior To Church Membership* – getting acquainted with prospective members must start before the person makes a decision to join the church. This will help to form a relationship with the new member before he or she comes to church. If the leaders and church members are successful in motivation to invite and bring their friends to church, evangelism and assimilation can become one victorious step.
- *Involvement in Ministry* – while attempting to close the back door, the church should encourage new members to become involved. Involved members, who are active in church, will most likely feel they are a part of the church.
- *Small Group Participation* – The forth strategy for church assimilation, is to have new members to become a part of small groups within the congregation. The impact of small groups is essential in creating a sense of belonging. *Spiritual Growth* – The final key to assimilation, say Macintosh and Martin, is spiritual growth. Such is the discipleship thrust of the Church Growth Movement. The deeper the level of discipleship, the more likely assimilation is to take place. Church leaders must seek innovative and challenging ways for all members to have opportunities to grow in Christ.
- *Having A Clear Vision* – a clear vision is crucial to for church assimilation. A clear, Great Commission vision creates a sense of “being on the team.”

3. What Makes People Want To Stay At A Church?

One researcher by the name of Sahlin found that people stayed members of churches because of:

- *Bonding* - If the new member finds at least six friends among the congregation during their first year, he is likely to stay.
- *Involvement* - If the new member is asked to take a role in the activities of the church, she is likely to stay active. Again, the definition is very precise. The responsibilities given to a new member must be given early on and be appropriate to a newcomer. The key is to find things that a new member can easily succeed. This builds their confidence and encourages them to do more.

- *Spiritual Growth* - If the new member is given the opportunity to continue to grow in Christ, ask questions, and explore practical topics, she is likely to remain a church member. One mistake that is often made that results in losing a new member is the termination of weekly bible studies. "It was great," one former member recalled to me. "I was getting all this attention. The pastor or one of the elders came to my home weekly to study the bible with me, then when I was baptized, immediately they quit coming."
- *Grace* - If new member experiences understanding, acceptance, and forgiveness during his halting steps as a "babe in Christ," he is more likely to remain a member. In fact, many of the dropouts interviewed report that observing someone else in the congregation treated in a judgmental way led them to quit attending.

4. How Does Unity Help In Church Membership Retention?

Christian unity happens when church members feel assimilation, that is, when all members have been bound together to the point that they have daily fellowship and meaningful communication with each other. Five signs of unity that makes good relationships within a church's fellowship based on Acts 2:41-47 they are:

- The Way of Entrance. This means that each member has become a part of the body of Christ through baptism into Christ.
- Authority of Apostolic Leaders. All members follow the authority of the leaders of the church.
- Fellowship of Believers. Believers have become family and friends who mingle and come together often for the purpose of love and fellowship.
- Commonality of Property. Everyone shares what he or she has for the sake of the entire church family. Nobody will lack, neither will they go unnoticed for they all will care and watch over each other.
- Witness of Joy. All members will share their testimony about their salvation, faith, and commonality in Christ.

5. What Does The Bible Say About Church Membership Unity?

In 1 Corinthians 12: 12-26 the apostle, Paul writes to the Corinthian church saying:

For the body is one, and with many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, is one body, so also is Christ. For one Spirit makes us all free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body are not one member, but many. That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer

with it, or one member is honored, all members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular.

6. Is There A Covenant That Gives A Mandate For The Church to Be Concerned for the Welfare of its members?

Yes, the “Baptist Covenant,” (covenant means “promise”) reminds all Christians, especially Baptist Christians, of this responsibility. It states:

We further engage to watch over, to pray for, to exhort and stir up each other unto every good word and work; to guard each other’s reputation, not needlessly exposing the infirmities of others; to participate in each other’s joy’s, and with tender sympathy bear one another’s burdens and sorrows; to cultivate Christian courtesy; to be slow to give or take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, being mindful of the rules of the Savior in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, to secure it without delay; and throughout life, amid evil report, and good report, to seek to live to the glory of God, who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

As we become more aware and knowledgeable concerning the “swinging door problem,” let’s not forget the mission of Christ, the words of the bible, and the covenant of our faith. Together, let’s do all we can to slow down the “swinging door” within the four sacred walls of Greater Vision Missionary Baptist Church.

APPENDIX C
POSTTEST SURVEY RESULTS

POSTTEST RESULTS

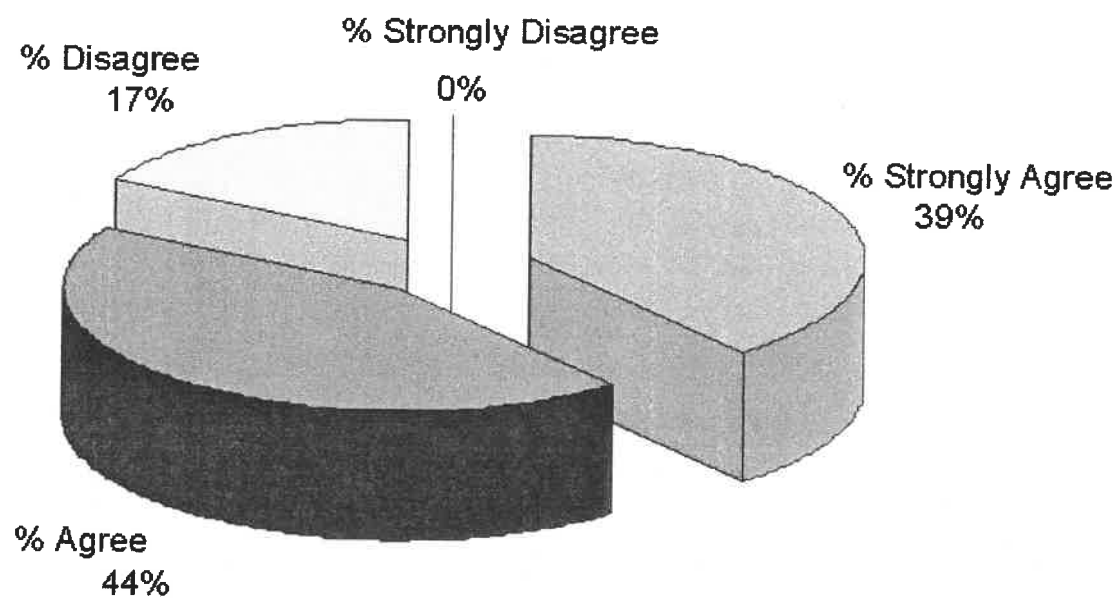
Doctoral Project: Membership Retention Post-Test Survey

Total Response	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 5	Q 6	Q 7	Q 8	Q 9	Q 10
Strongly Agree	9	9	6	3	15	5	8	12	7	1-2: 5
% Strongly Agree	39	39	26	13	65	22	35	52	31	22
Agree	10	10	13	6	7	15	14	9	8	3-4: 3
% Agree	44	44	57	26	31	65	61	39	4	13
Disagree	4	4	4	9	1	3	1	2	6	5-6: 3
% Disagree	17	17	17	39	4	13	4	9	26	13
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	2	7+: 12
% Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	22	0	0	0	0	9	52

Total Response	Q 11	Q 12	Q 13	Q 14	Q 15	Q 16	Q 17	Q 18	Q 19	Q 20
Strongly Agree	16	8	10	10	10	0	9	8	5	5
% Strongly Agree	69	35	43	43	43	0	39	35	22	22
Agree	5	12	11	8	8	8	8	12	16	16
% Agree	22	52	48	35	35	35	35	52	69	69
Disagree	2	3	2	5	3	8	4	3	2	2
% Disagree	9	13	9	22	22	35	17	13	9	9
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	7	2	0	0	0
% Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	30	9	0	0	0

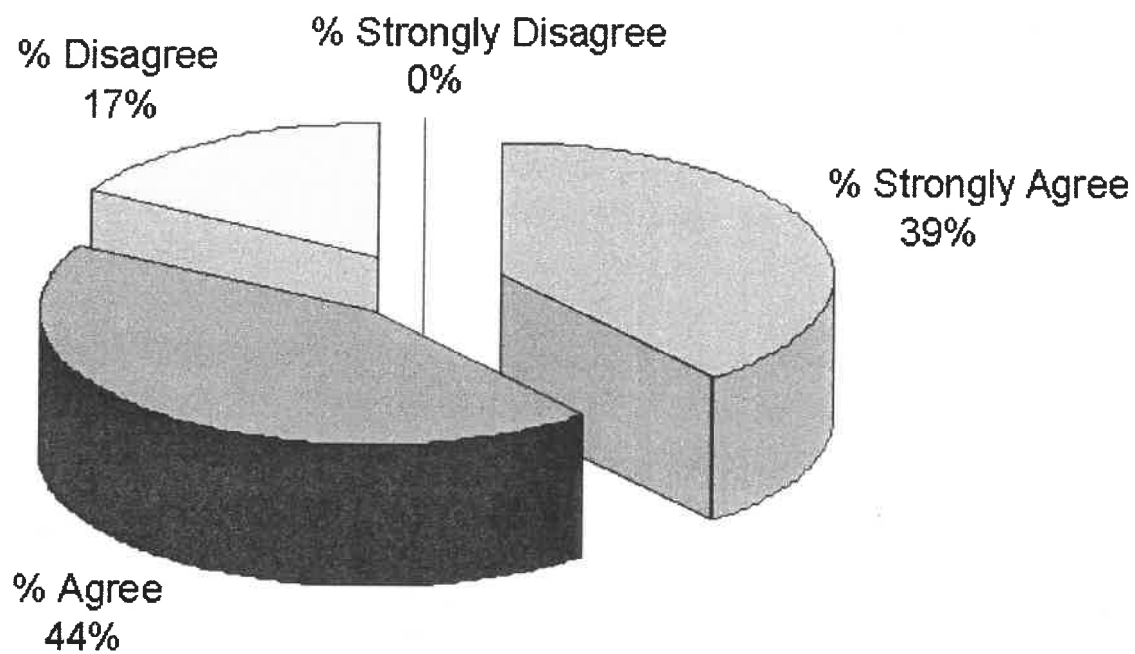
1. I am able to define what the word assimilation means.

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 1



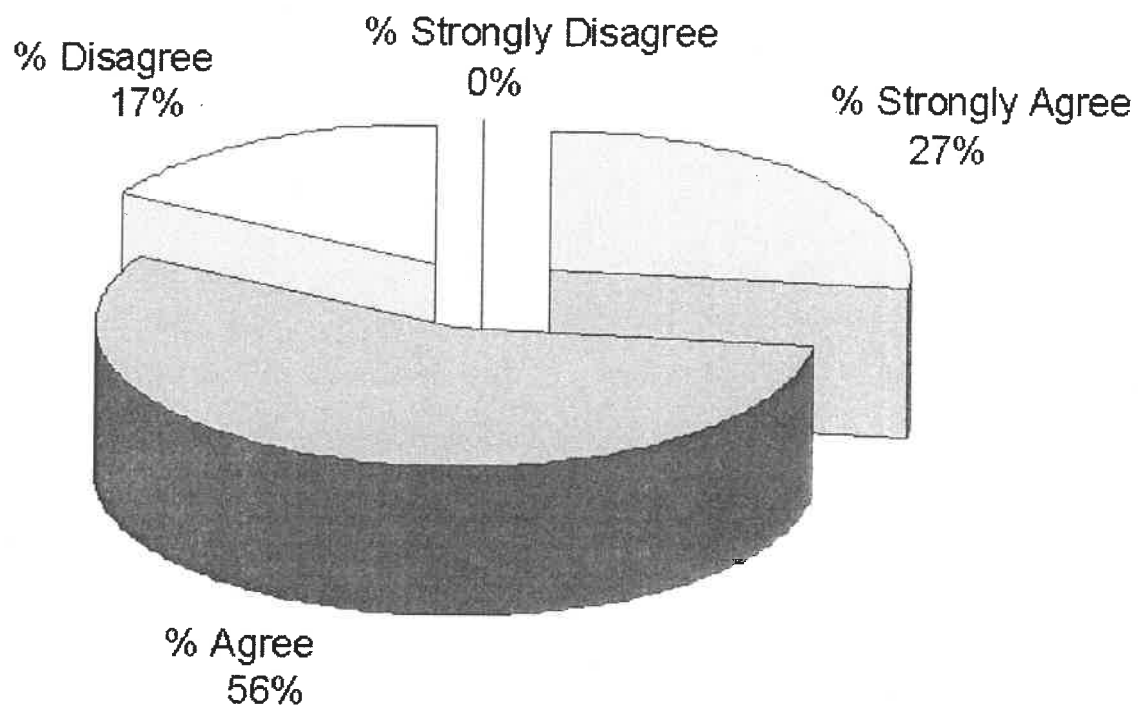
2. I understand how the word assimilation relates to church membership retention in the body of Christ.

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 2



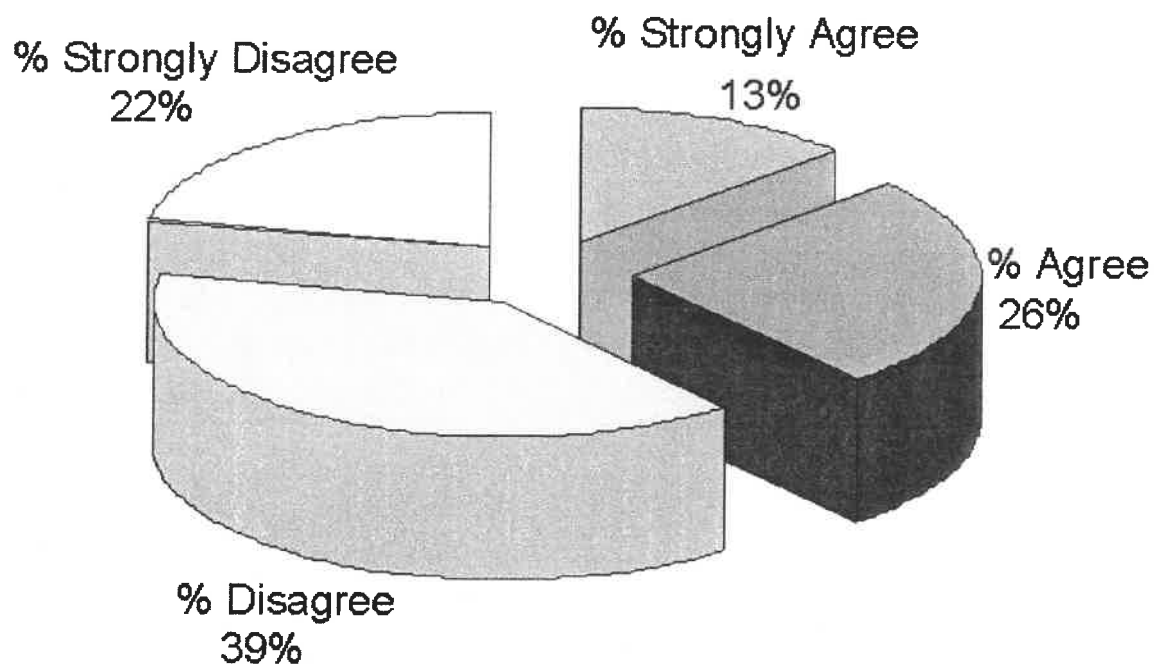
3. I have a desire to assimilate our church members and also have some ideas of how that can be done.

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 3



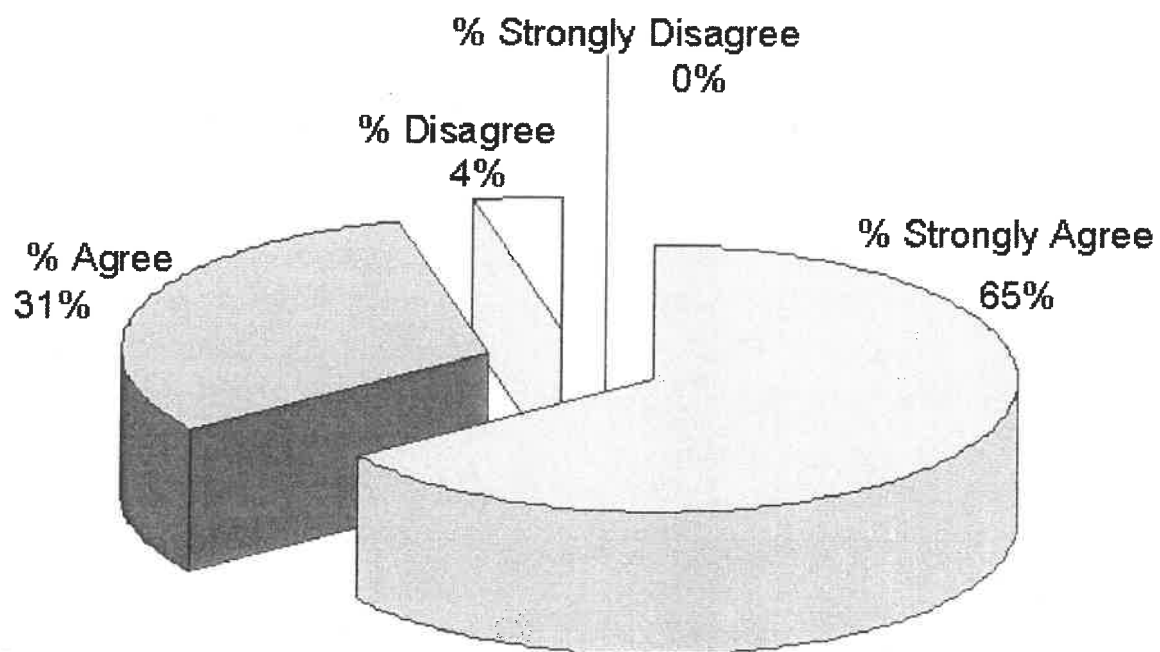
4. Most people leave their local church because they just aren't committed.

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 4



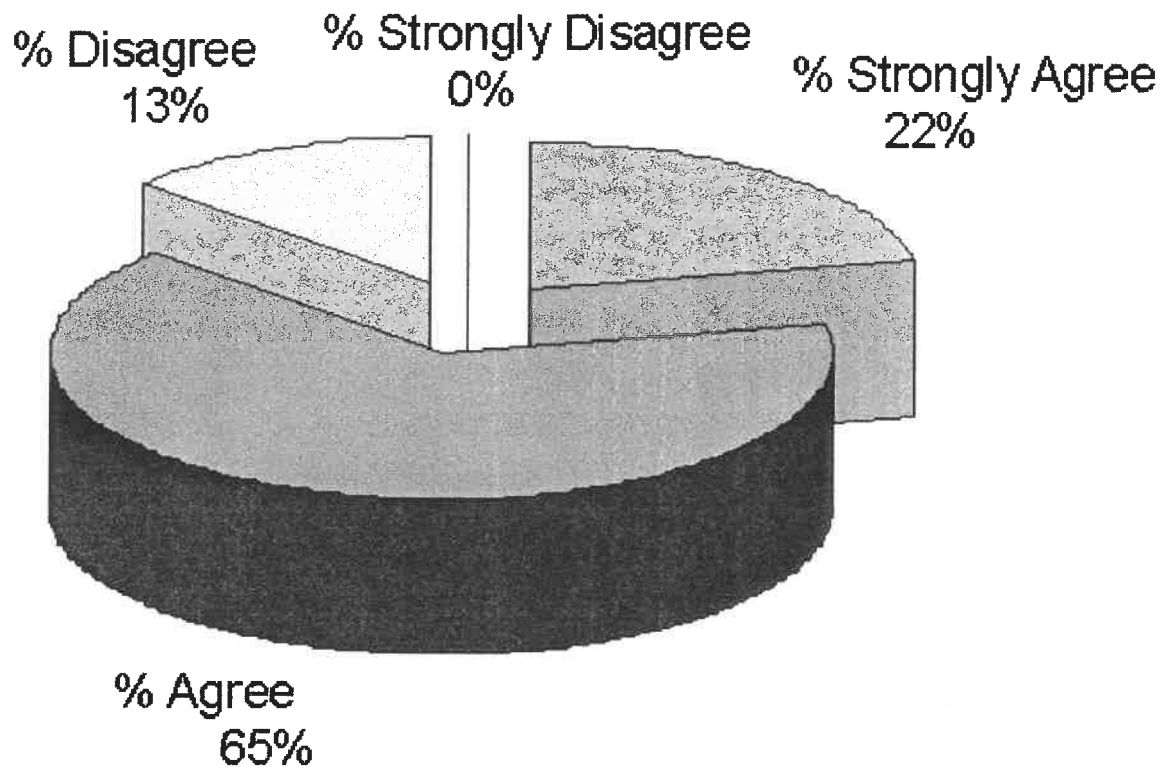
5. There are some things our church can do to help retain members.

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 5



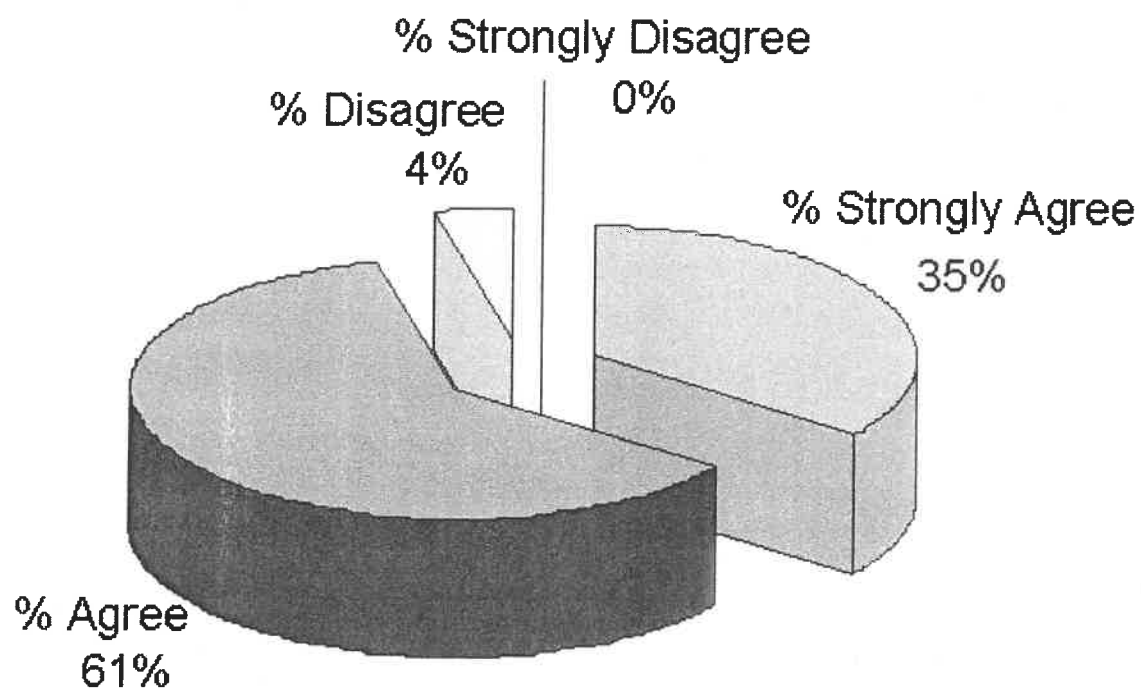
6. Our church is a loving and caring church.

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 6



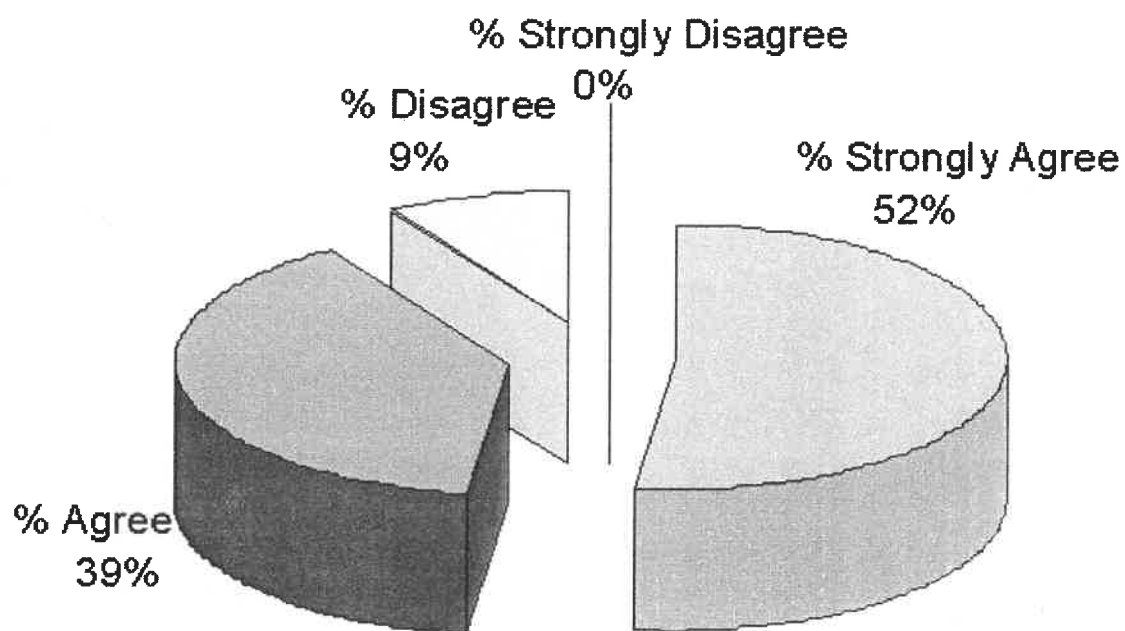
7. Our pastor is a loving, caring, and friendly pastor.

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 7



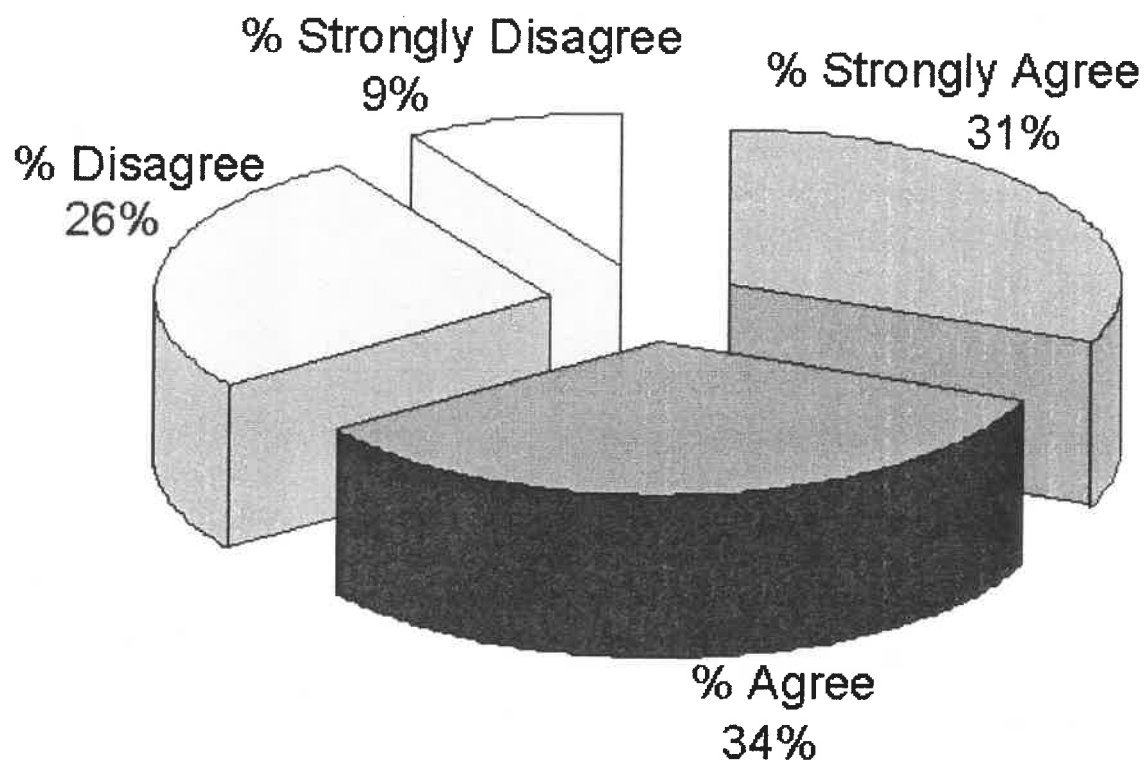
8. Our church can do more in the way of outreach and hospitality to help retain church membership.

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 8



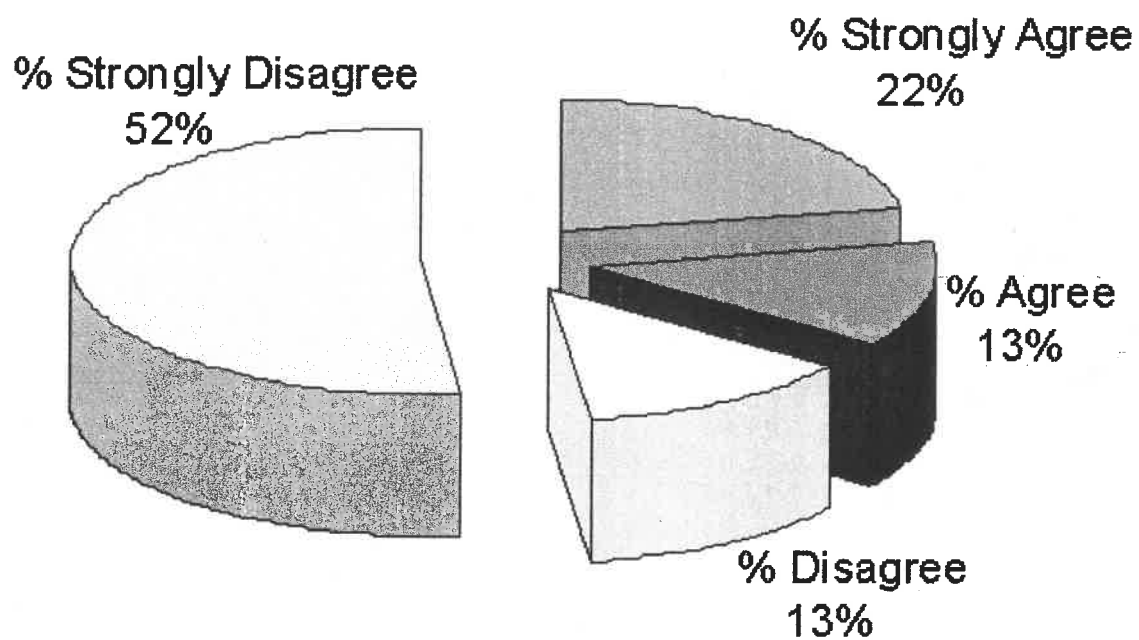
9. I consider myself to be an outgoing church member.

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 9



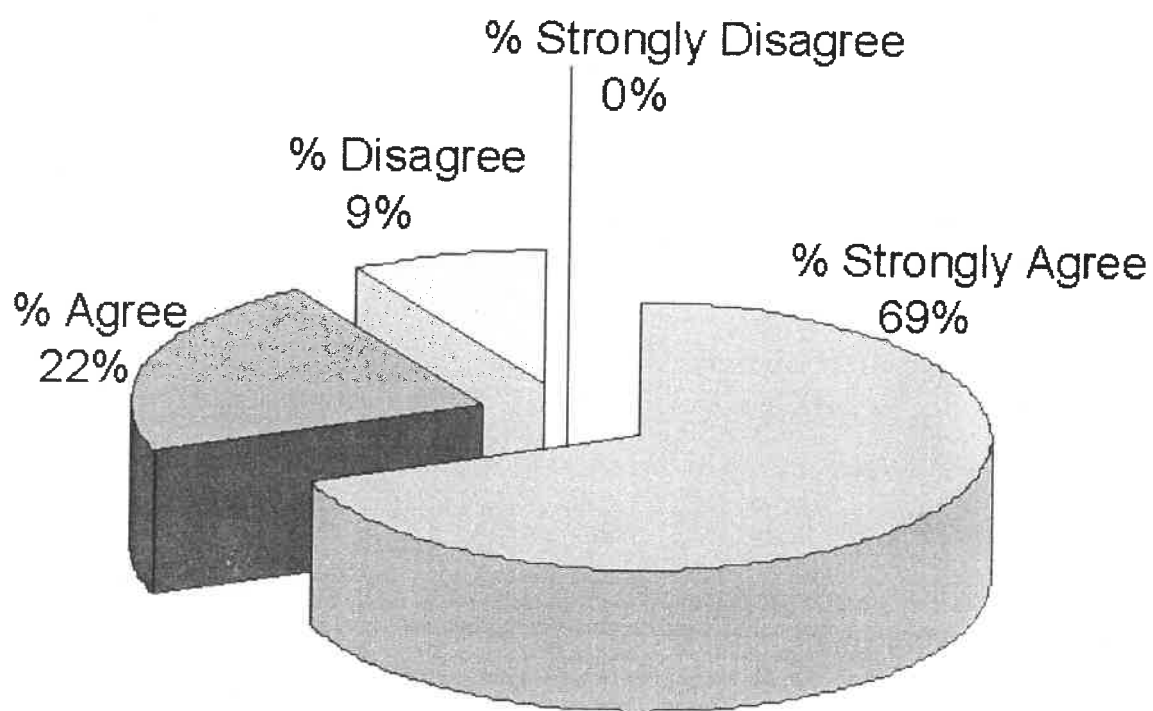
10. I have been a member of Greater Vision for:

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 10



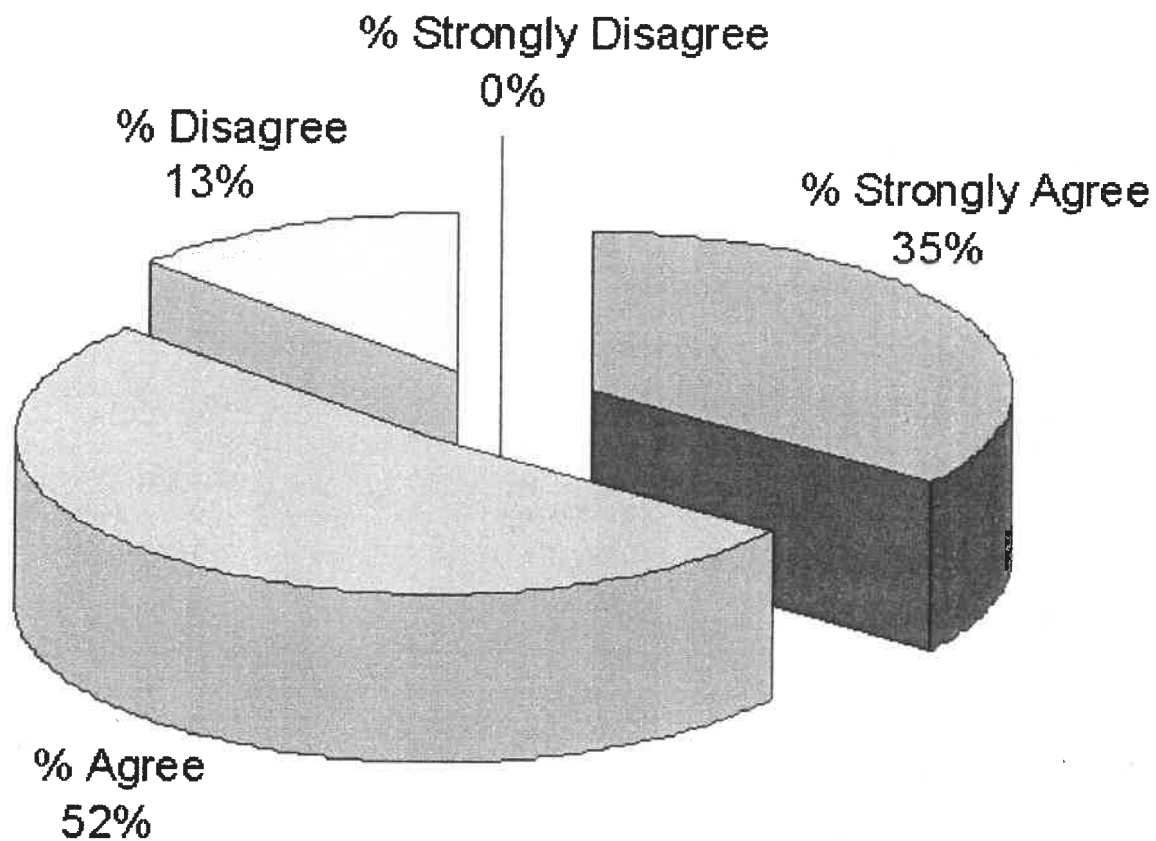
11. It is every Christian's responsibility to help maintain church membership.

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 11



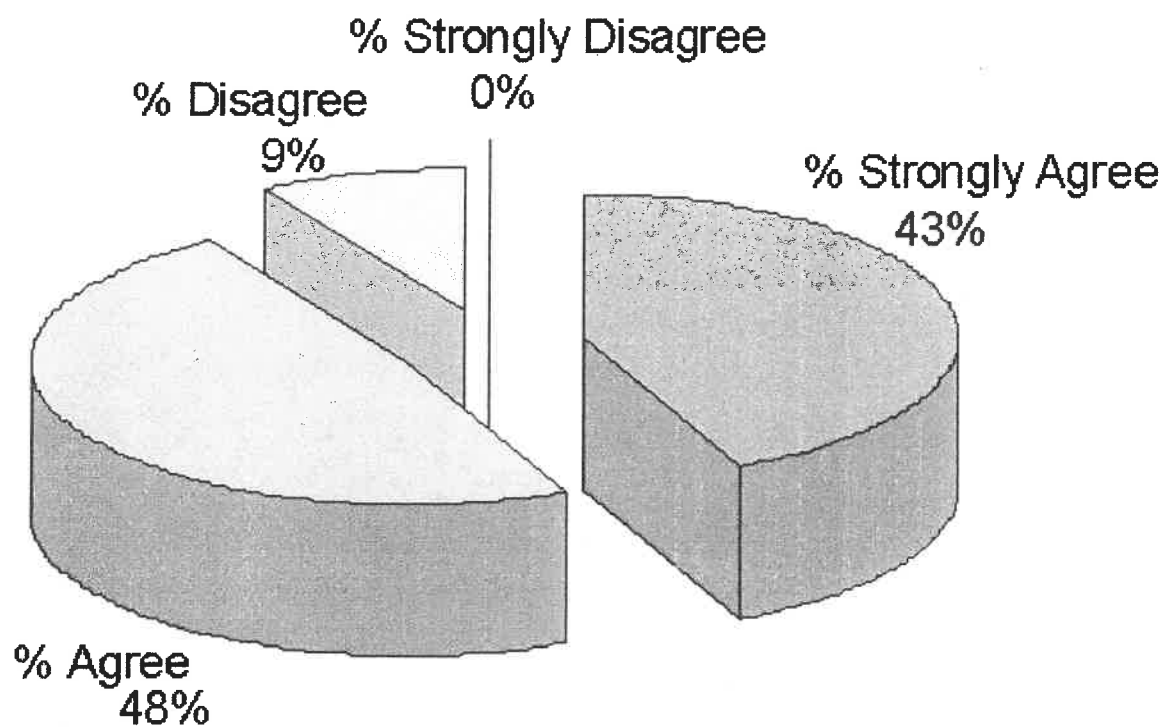
12. I know and understand the definition of assimilation and how it relates to church membership retention.

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 12



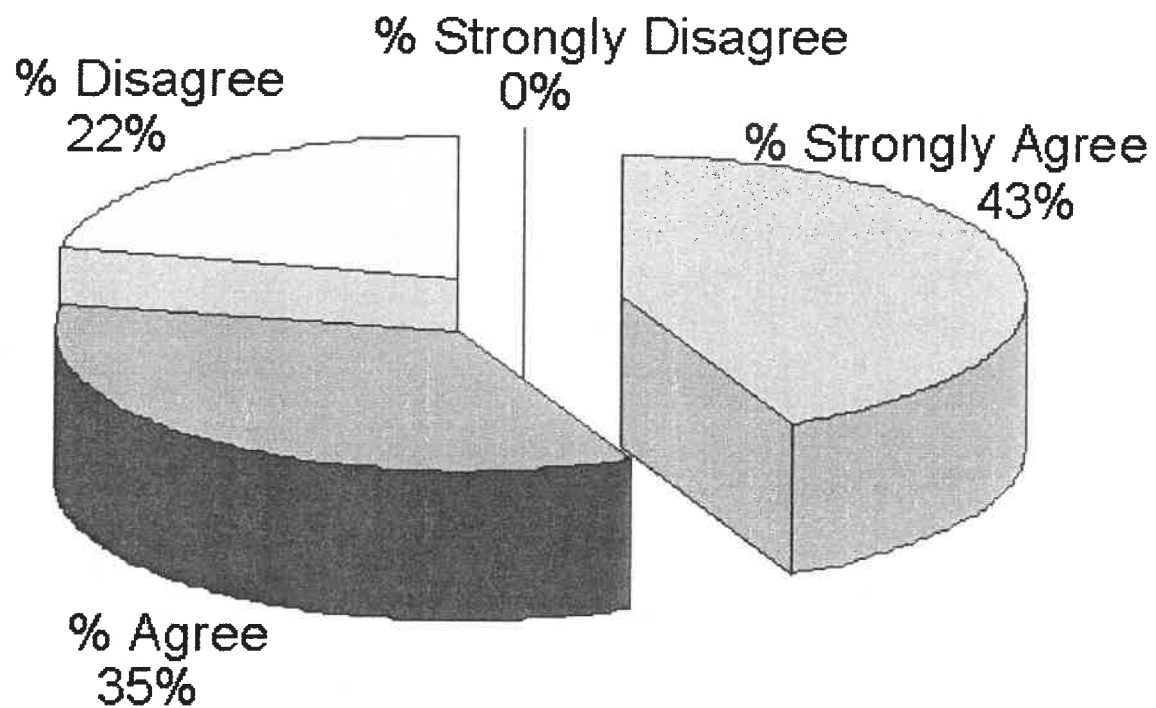
13. It is very important for all church members to become active in the local church.

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 13



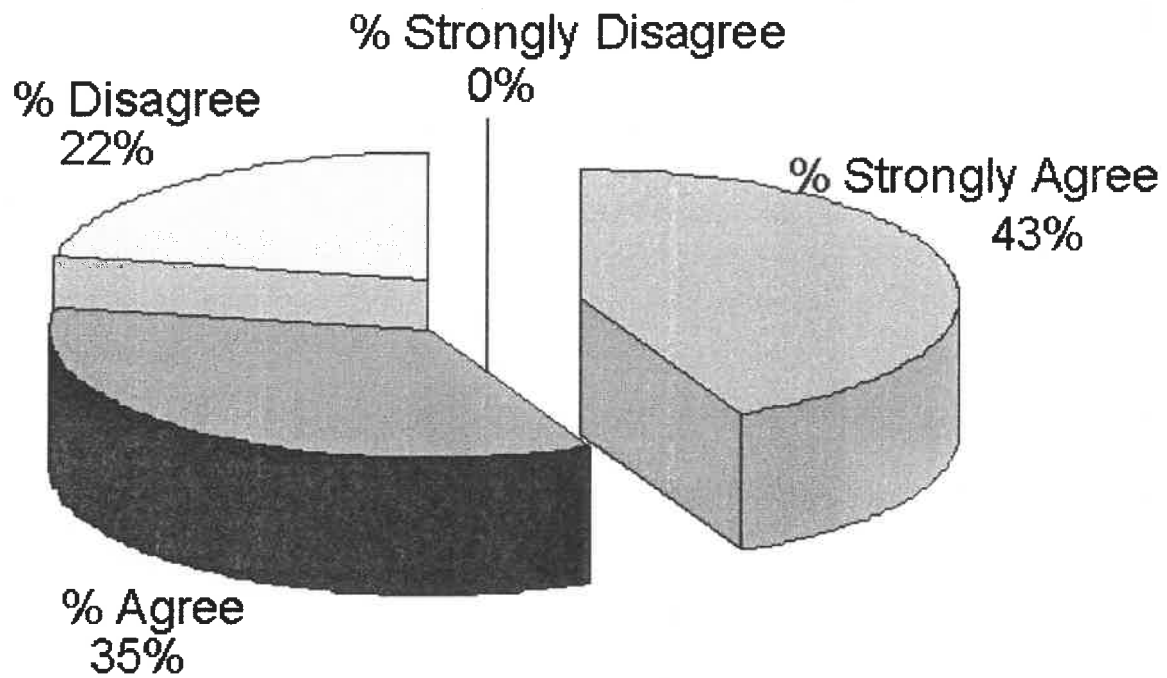
14. I am able to define the term Universal Church and Local Church and the relationship between both.

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 14



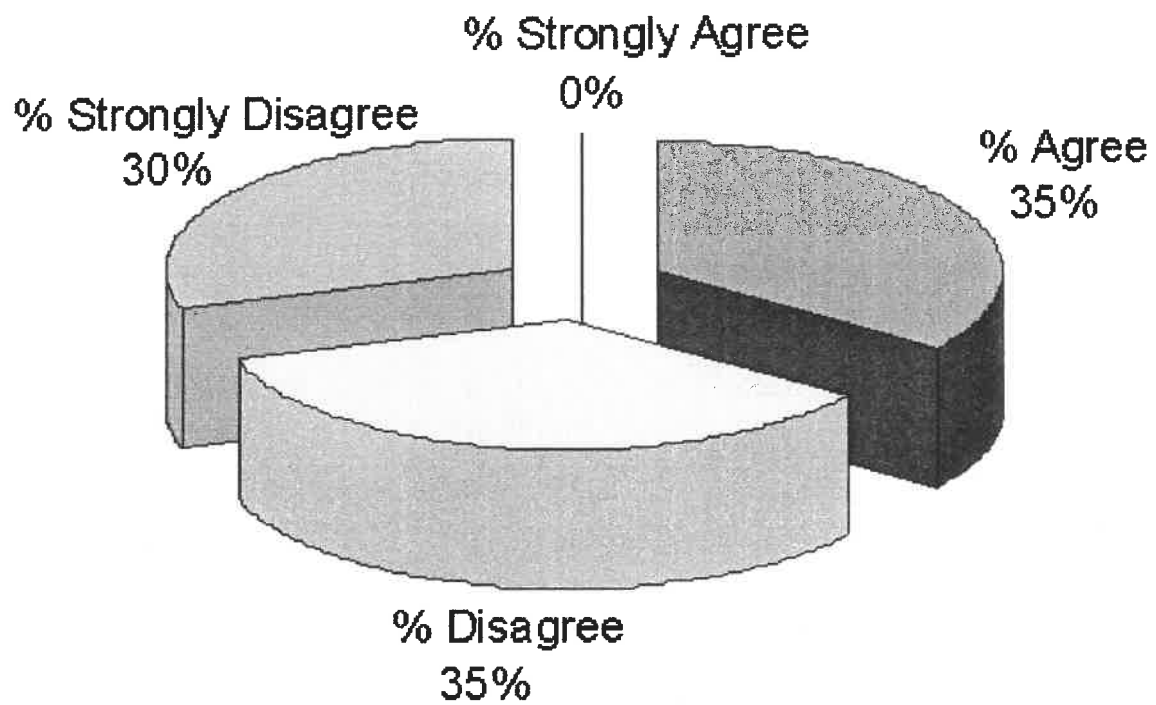
15. I understand what is meant by the church "Swinging Door" problem."

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 15



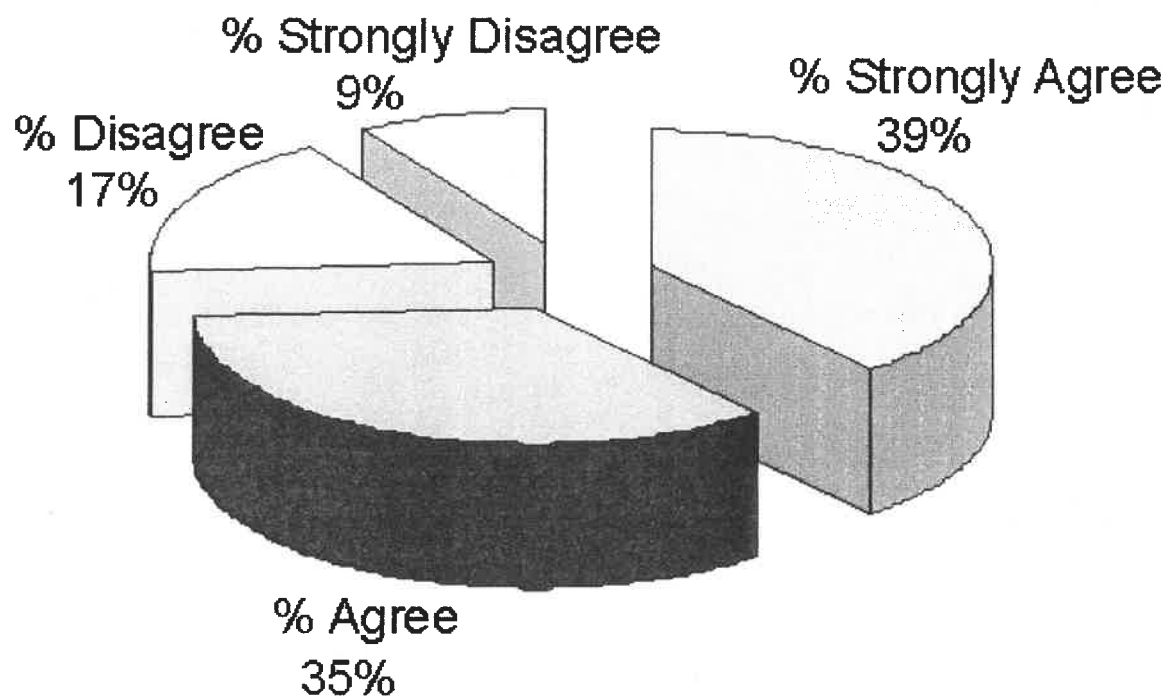
16. It is the Pastor's responsibility to solve the "Swinging Door" problem.

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 16



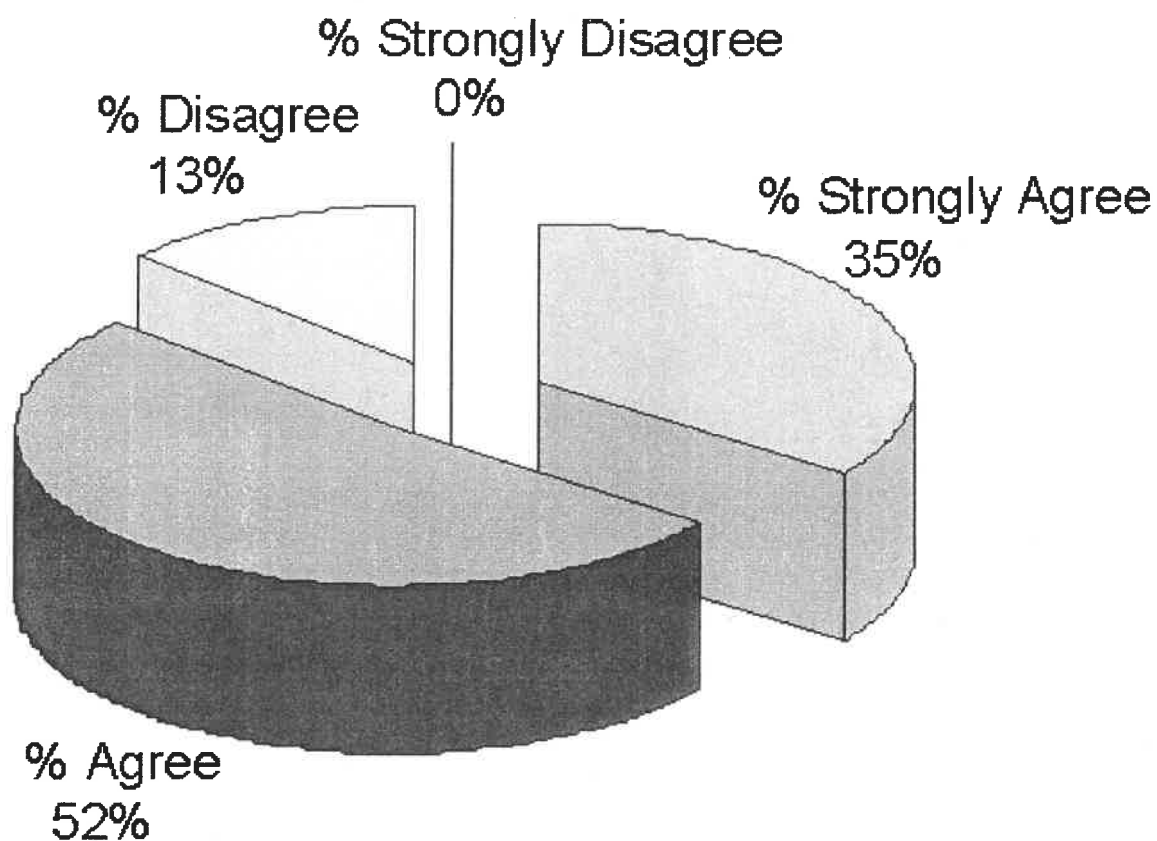
17. I understand what is meant to “retain” church members.

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 17



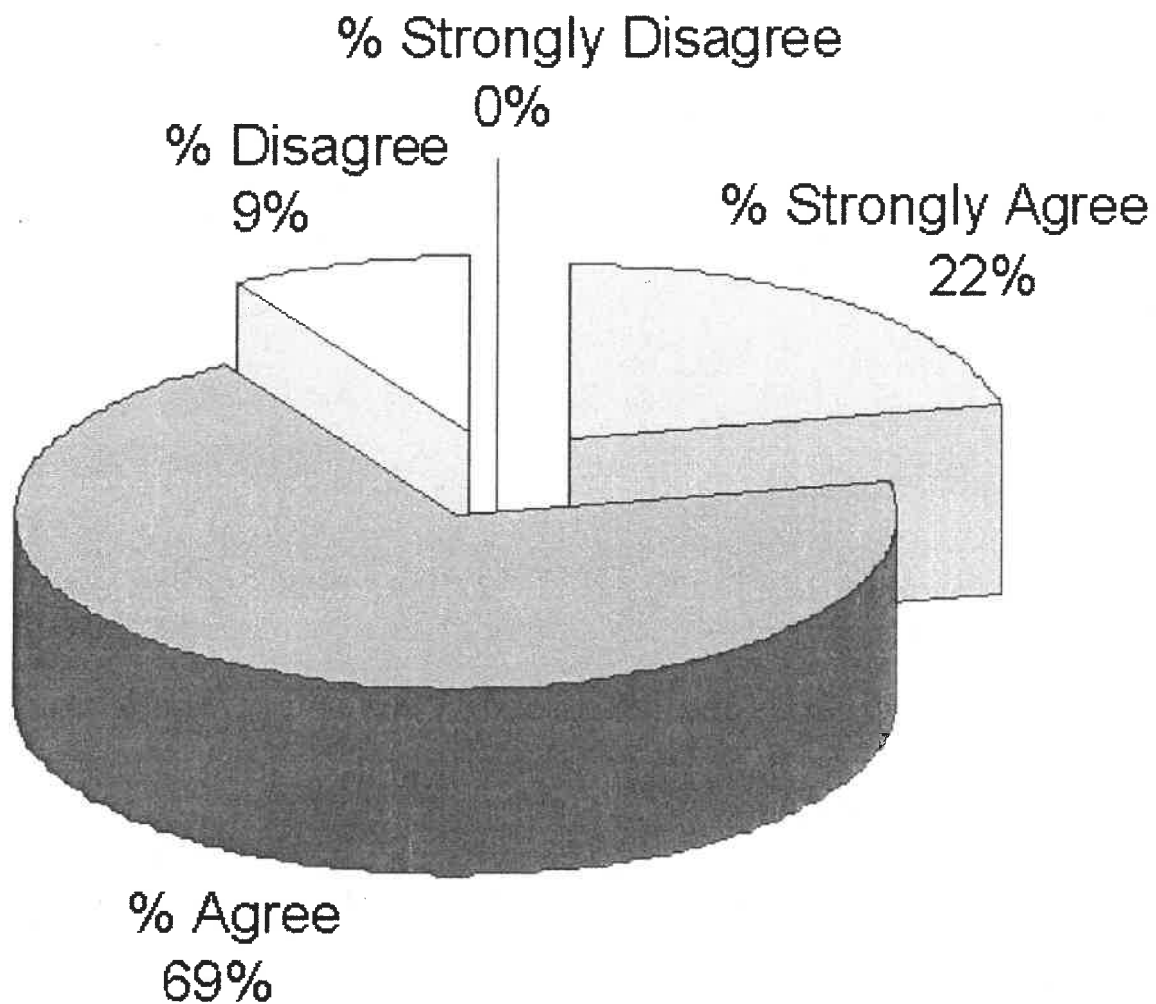
18. I believe that a swinging door problem exist within our church.

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 18



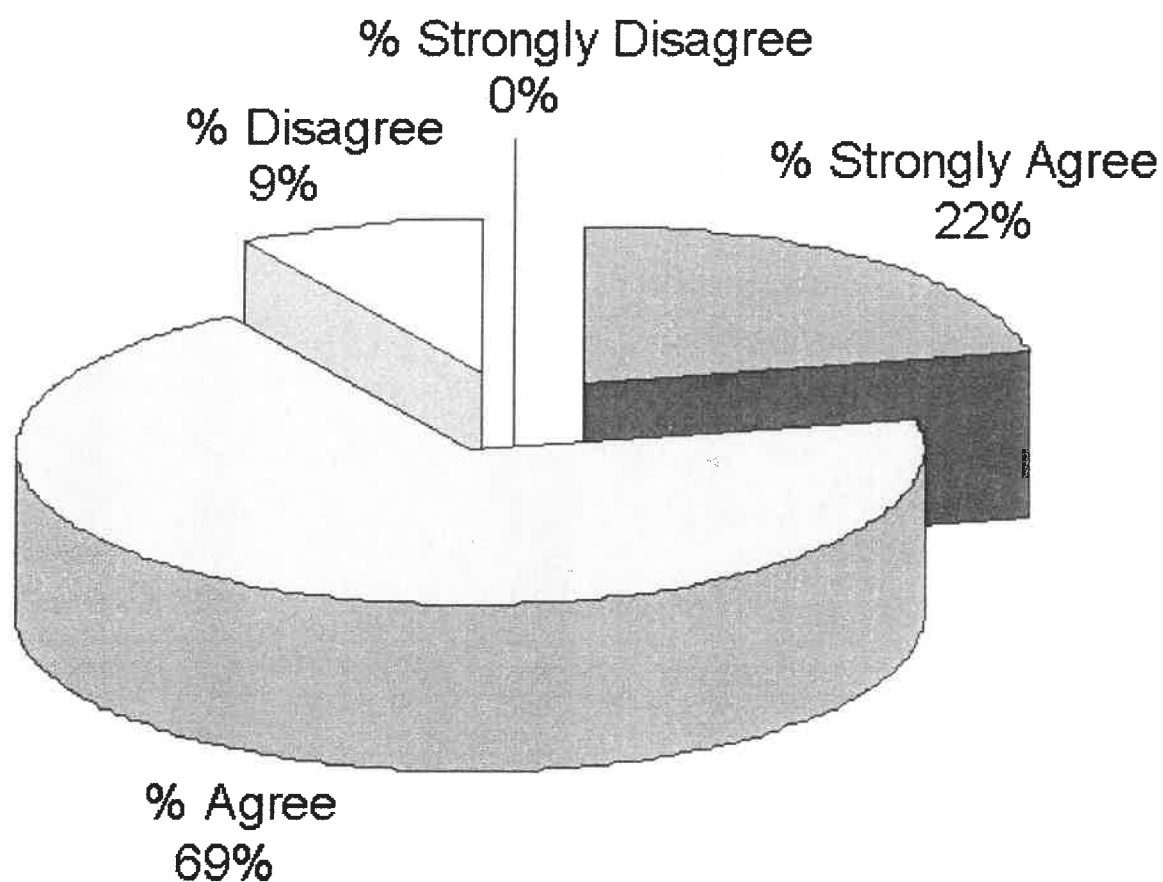
19. I would like to do more on my part to help slow down or solve the church's "swinging door" problem.

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 19



20. I would like to learn more through teaching and preaching concerning how to maintain church membership and how to close the "swinging door."

POST-TEST SURVEY - QUESTION 20



APPENDIX D
SERMON SERIES

How to Keep the Sheep
By Rev. Marvin L. Miller, Sr.

Luke 15:4-6

“What man of you having a hundred sheep if he loses one of them doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which was lost until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors saying unto them rejoice with me for I have found my sheep which was lost. Likewise, joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

Subject: How to Keep the Sheep

We in the body of Christ spend much time learning how to minister for the sake of Christ. As a result, we know that we have basically a five-fold ministry. We must

Worship God: Evangelize and tell the world about Jesus; and **Fellowship** new members into the body of Christ; **Discipleship**, that is to teach and train new members how to be Christians; and we must also roll our sleeves up and do **Hands On Ministry** for the kingdom of God.

Now, besides worshiping God, we probably spend most of our time evangelizing, telling people about Jesus and the salvation that comes about when He is made Lord and Savior. Yes, that's very important for in the 28th chapter of Matt. Jesus tells us to “Go ye therefore and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.”

So, it's good to know that somebody has been saved by hearing the gospel of Christ. But to the contrary, it's a terrible thing for those who have received this great salvation to become lost within the household of faith. You may inquire, is this possible? I say, yes, my friends it certainly is. For statistics all over the country and the world indicate that while people are accepting Christ in large numbers, they are also loosing commitment and straying from local churches just as quickly. In fact, the new buzz phrase for this is

dilemma is the “church swinging door problem.” This problem signifies that most of our churches have revolving doors where people swing out as quickly as they swing into the church. And that’s a terrible thing, to be saved by Christ but lost in the church.

Now, I know that somebody here or even out in radio land is asking, how can one be saved by Christ, but lost in the church. Well, let me explain it to you. Every born again believer in Jesus Christ is saved. Now, I know that somebody out there is saying, no, that’s not right. You’ve got to belong to my church. You’ve got to be slain in the spirit. You’ve got to speak like I speak. But Romans 10:8-9 tells us that if you confess the Lord Jesus and believe that God has raised Him from the dead thou shall be saved.

Therefore, anyone who has truly done this has been saved and has become a member of the Universal Church of Christ. Not Buddha’s church. Not Mohammed’s Church, Not Sweet Daddy Graces Church, Not Sung Yung Moon’s Church, but Christ’s church.

Now, Christ’s universal church is can be found operating within local churches which may be located in various States, cities, neighborhood and even denominations. These churches are supposed to exist to witness for Christ and carry out the great commission that He has given to His all members of the Universal church. But here is the problem, after those in the local church have evangelized and led someone to Christ, their job does not stop there. They have a responsibility to fellowship members into the body of Christ. That is to assimilate, or to make them part of the whole. To activate them, that is to put them to work in the body after they have been disciplined and taught what to do. Then thirdly, it is also the local churches job to try to reclaim those that have become disengaged, or separated from the flock. So unless, the local church does these things, the church will have a serious problem trying to keep the sheep.

Now don't play me as being naïve, or stupid. I've been in church all of my life. I was saved since the age of 12 and I am now 51 years of age, and I know beyond a doubt, that there are some members of the church that you can't save. Some have told to move on by God. Some are not committed and don't want to be committed, and some were never spiritually saved in the first place. They can't make a commitment to the local church because they never made a commitment to the universal Church. They simply don't know God in the free pardon of their sins.

But on the other hand, we local churches must admit that we have not done all we can to help welcome, assimilate and fellowship members into the body of Christ. And as a result, there have been those that have been saved by Christ, but lost in the body of Christ. So let's take a look at our text, and find out How To Keep The Sheep.

Here in the text the Pharisees have criticized Jesus loving and caring for the lost. They have said that Jesus hangs too much with those on the wild side. He talks with the demon possessed, he eats with publican and sinners, why he even became a close friend with an alleged prostitute and former demon possessed woman named Mary Magdalene. So they asked him why he keeps such bad company, and Jesus answers them with three parables about why it's important to save the lost. Now, there are six truths that this parable gives us that may help us to keep God's sheep.

- Number One – We Must See (Recognize) That A Sheep Has Been Lost
- Number Two – We Must Search For The Lost Sheep Until It is Found
- Number Three – We Must Secure the Sheep (Carry and Care For It) Once It found
- Number Four – We Must Shout And Rejoice Because The Sheep Is Safe And At Home.

Let's Sweep the House
By Rev. Marvin L. Miller, Sr.

Scripture: Luke 15:8-9

What woman having ten silvers coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.

Subject: Let's Sweep the House

I shared with you last week that the Lord had placed on my heart to do a sermon series with the theme being I am my brothers and Sister's Keeper. Meaning that I have a responsibility for caring for those who are first in the household of faith and also to win the Lost. Today the parable of the lost coin is placed in the middle of three parables about something or someone that is lost. In fact, Kenneth Bailey compares this story with that of the parable of the lost sheep and the prodigal or the lost son.

So we see that these parables are very much alike in their thematic emphasis. Yet and still these parables are not just great thematic literature they are given for a reason. Jesus tells this story to address questions and murmuring that arose by the Pharisees and the scribes, the teachers of the law concerning his association with publicans and sinners.

- They were saying that Jesus was a winebibber.
- They were saying that Jesus was a glutton who hung around publicans and sinners.
- They were wondering why a man like Jesus would take time to be around those of whom they felt was the lost.

So Jesus uses this parable, which some label as the apologetic parables, for two main purposes. First, to demonstrate God's love. Second, to show what a Godly person's attitude should be towards the lost. Now that's important today, for the truth is that many of our churches have a plethora of snooty people. There are too many people who act as though they have always been saved and never have been lost. But the truth of the matter is that all of us here are merely x-sinners who have been saved by Grace.

Let me see if there is a witness in here today. Is there anyone here who has never been lost in sin? Is there anyone who is not afraid to testify that one day God picked them up and turned them around? Is there a witness in here that can say one day the Lord saved me from the gutter-most to the utter most? I believe that there may indeed be someone like me who can say in the words of the old gospel song:

“I have heard the joyful sound. Jesus saves, Jesus saves. I must tell it all around. Jesus saves, Jesus saves. To the utmost Jesus saves. To the utmost Jesus saves. He will pick you up and turn you around. Hallelujah, Jesus saves.”

Last week we talked about the shepherd and the lost sheep, the parable of the lost sheep and we concluded that it is our responsibility to see, to search, to secure and to shout for the lost once they are found. But today, in this second parable Jesus uses a different illustration; he uses the illustration of a housewife, a woman. I thank God for that for some people believe that God can't use women to get his word and point across. For the truth of the matter that is that God can use anything or anyone for His glory. So God uses a woman and a lost coin to further demonstrate our sacred responsibility to find the lost.

Now, before I go further note that in the parable in the lost sheep, the sheep that is lost has left the fold. Thus, the shepherd leaves the 99 to search for the lost. But today's parable is different. This lady does not have to leave the house because what has been lost has been lost in the house. Let me see if I can bring into today's context. Whereas we churches spend a lot of time going out into the world to see the UN-saved, the lost, there may be some right here at Greater Vision who don't know Jesus. In addition there may be those who do know Jesus but they feel lost and disconnected as a part of this local body of saints. They may be saved, but for some reason, they have become lost in the house. Thus the lost coin may not be at the nightclubs. The lost coin may not be at the drug house. The

lost coin may not be on streets of prostitution, or among the gang bangers, but just like the coin in the story the lost may be members that are right here within the four walls of this church. Somebody within this fellowship may indeed feel lost in the house.

Now, this feeling of lost-ness may be the fault of the body of Christ, because sometimes we become so clique-ish until we show favoritism to a certain members while we overlook others. But on the other hand it may be the fault of the disenchanted, for it takes time and commitment to develop meaningful Christian relationship. And some people don't want to take on the responsibility of real fellowship and friend ship, once they are a part of the group or church family then, they have a responsibility to love care, pray for, cry with and rejoice along with their brothers and sisters. And so it is possible to be saved by Jesus but lost in the local church house. Let's see how the woman in the text dealt with that which was lost in the house.

Number One - She Turned On the Light – She Lit Her Candle

First, our text says when the woman began to search for the coin she lit her candle. That may suggest that maybe folks are lost because our lights are not shining. If that is true we need to get it together, for Jesus said that we are the salt of the earth and the light sitting on a hill. This means that in order for us to find what is lost, we must do what the woman in the parable did. The bible says that the first thing she did was light a candle. Well how can we light a candle? We light a candle by loving like Jesus loved. We light a candle by doing what Jesus did. We light a candle by reaching out as Jesus reached out. We light a light by walking in the light of Jesus. The bible tells us that if we walk in the light as He is in the light then we have fellowship and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness. The psalmist put it like this: walk in the light, beautiful light. Shone

where the dew drops of mercy shines bright. Shine all around us by day and by night.
Jesus is the light of the world.”

Number Two – She Lifted Her Broom

The second thing that the text informs us concerning this woman’s search was that she lifted her broom. This broom was the resource that she had to search for the coin. She had no medal detector. She had no modern vacuum sweeper so she used the resource that she had to search for that which was lost. Like this lady we ought to use what we have. We may not have the greatest interpersonal skills, but we ought to use what we have. We may not be the most popular person in the church, but we should use what we have. We may not be the top tither or giver in the church, but hat does not matter. Don’t worry about what you don’t have; sweep the house with what you do have. If you must, sweep the house with love. Sweep the house with peace. Sweep the house with long suffering service. Sweep the house with patience for that which is lost. You don’t have to be an officer of the church. You don’t have to be a deacon or deaconess. You don’t have to be a preacher or teacher, just use what God has given you to show that you are concerned and that you care about the disenchanted and lost. Use what you have and sweep the house.

Number Three – She Found the Coin

Note that while this woman house was being cleaned at the same time that she looked for the coin, cleaning the house was secondary and finding the coin was primary. This may suggest to us that once we find the coin the house will become clean. For you see:

- The house is dirty, until all believers have all things in common.
- The house is dirty when some members feel disenchanted and disassociated.
- The house is dirty until all members are effectively assimilated.
- The house is dirty until your concerns become my concerns and my concerns become your concerns.
- This house is dirty until your joys are my joys and your sorrows are my sorrows.
- The house is dirty, until we recognize that there are no big "I's" or little "you's" in the body of Christ.

Therefore, it's only when we find the lost, that we will have a clean Holy Ghost filled house of God.

Number Four - When She Found The Coin She Showed Her Joy

The bible says that this woman rejoiced. Why is it that she rejoiced?

- She rejoiced because the coin had been part of a set of ten and now they were all now back together.
- She rejoiced because the coin was valuable and it had been found.
- She rejoiced because her efforts to find the coin were not in vain.

So she called her friends and said rejoice with me, because I found what has been lost in the house.

As I close, let me suggest to you that there can be no real rejoicing until the entire set, the body of Christ is back together.

- There can be no true praise until the valuable people who are lost in the house have been found, assimilated, reclaimed and activated into the mainstream of church membership.
- There can be no true rejoicing until we realize that the entire body of Christ is valuable.
- There can be no true rejoicing until that which has been lost is found.

But once the lost is found, we all can all rejoice.

- We rejoice by singing "Onward Christian Soldiers Marching On To War."
- We can rejoice as we sing a stanza of "The Church Is One Foundation."
- We can rejoice and sing, "We Are Marching To Zion."
- We can sing with the lost, "Once Was Lost But Now I'm Found."

And the entire body of Christ can sing to one another the words of the modern gospel song:

I need you. You need me. We are a part of God's body. Stand with me. Agree with me. We are a part of God's body. It is his will that every need will be supplied. You are important to me I need you to survive.

Come my brothers and my sisters, let's sweep the house.

There's No Place Like Home
By Rev. Marvin L. Miller, Sr.

Text: Luke 15:11-24

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men. So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

Subject: There is No Place Like Home

For the e past few weeks we have focused on three of Jesus' parables entitled the parables of the lost. In the first message, "How to Keep the Sheep," we learned that it is our responsibility not only to preach salvation to the lost, but also to look after those sheep that become part of the body of Christ. And we said in order to do this we must see that the sheep is straying, search for the sheep until we find it, secure the sheep once it has been found, then shout and rejoice because it has been found.

In the second message, "Let's Sweep the House we observed a housewife who has lost a coin right in the house, and we noted that there may be some people right within the church walls that can be spiritually and socially lost. But we also learned from this parable what must be done to find that which has been lost in the house. Now we know that we

must light our candles to expose the darkness. We must sweep the house until the lost is found. We must call our friends and rejoice that the coin has been found.

Today, the last of these parables is called the parable of the lost son, also known as the parable of the prodigal son. Now although you will not find the word prodigal in the text its still a very important term, because the word "prodigal" means wasteful which defines to a tee what happened once the son in this parable left home. For the scripture tells us that he wasted all - he had on riotous living.

Now, I believe that of all three of these parables, this one in particular, points out how God, our father loves and cares about those who are lost and have gone astray. And while meditating on this parable could not help but to notice that Jesus used non-human things as illustrations in the parables of the lost sheep and coin, but in this parable he uses real life people, a young son, that represents one that rebels against authority; a older son who represents the self righteous (those who have questioned Jesus about His association with the lost; and a loving father who is ready to receive His wayward child in spite of where he has been or what he has done. So much to the point that once the prodigal son gets in trouble he says to himself, I'm going back to my daddies because I have discovered that there is no place like home. Let's see what this word of God has to offer us today.

First – Some Are Lost Because Of Rebellion

In the first two parables, we find that the sheep became lost because it was led astray. The coin was lost because it was either misplaced or mishandled. But this son is not called lost because he was led astray or misplaced or mishandled. In fact, he was in a loving home, that could provide him with his every need, but he did not want to abide there. You see His daddy had rules and regulations. In His daddy's house, he had

responsibilities. In his daddy's house, he had to remember that the Lord our God is one and that though must love God with all of your heart, soul and mind. In his daddy's house he could not say everything he was big enough to say, neither could he could lay everything he was big enough to lay. So, to go against his father, which by the way is what rebellion means, he went to his daddy and said, man you are too strict, I'm grown, I can't do what I want to do in your house, so I'm out of here. And that's one of the main reason why churches today are faced with the swinging door problem, where people join the church but soon swing out, is because they find out that even though you can come to Jesus as you are, you can't stay as you were. In fact there is a standard that the Lord uphold for all that are in His house, Romans 12 tells us, "I beseech ye therefore by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice and, which is your reasonable service, and be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...." But even though one may hear this anointed word, no matter how much we may encourage them; no matter how much we call them; they will still stray because they have given in to the devils deceiving and rebellious spirit, And let me say parenthetically, that you ought not to be deceived by Satan yourself. Don't leave the church just because things don't go your way, don't leave the Lord because you are being tempted to do something contrary to His standard. If you get weak just go to your daddy and say, "I need thee, oh I need thee..."

Second – One May Leave Home Because They Are Impatient

Note that the young man wanted his inheritance now, Now, normally an inheritance was only given after the death of the father. Not only that, but it was older son who was to first be considered for the inheritance. But this boy said "Father, give me the

portion of goods that falleth to me.” And the amazing thing is that the father did not argue He gave it to him. Why? Because he knew that his son was rebellious and had already made up his mind, yet he also knew his son. He knew that he was not ready. He knew that the world would treat him cruelly, but had to let the boy find this out for himself. My brothers and sisters there are times when God will give in to your rebellious spirit. When He will allow the fellowship between Himself and the rebellious to be broken. There are times when God simply feels, "my child needs a good lesson. My child needs to learn respect. My child needs to reverence me. My child needs to worship me. My child needs to learn to praise my name. My child does not know how good that he or she has it, so I will allow for our fellowship to be broken and perhaps sooner or later, they will know that there is no place like home.”

Third – Because the Way of the World Is Wasteful and Wild

Verse 13 says that he gathered all his things and journeyed into a far country and wasted his substance with riotous living. Finally, Because After They Come To Themselves They Will Realize That There Is No Place Like Home. (I'm going back to my daddy's house.)

Runaway Child Running Wild
By Rev. Marvin L. Miller, Sr.

Luke 15:11-24

“And he (JESUS) said, a certain man had two sons and the younger of them said to his father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto him his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land and he began to be in want.

And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he should fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, how many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough to spare, and I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants.

And he arose, and came to his father, but when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more to be called thy son. But the father said to his servant, bring forth the best robe, and put on him and put a ring on his head, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and be merry for this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost, and is now found and they began to be merry.

Subject: Runaway Child Running Wild

Most of you in here know that I love music. In fact, I love most types of music, just as long as the lyrics are not ungodly. As long as the song does not include vulgar language or suggest that we should do anything displeasing to God. Yes, I love just about any type of music.

And so I was awoken the other night as I pondered over what the Lord wanted me to say to you today. I had read the scriptures. I had prayed for God to give me a message. But for two nights in a row, the Lord did not give me a subject. But on Wednesday night I went to bed, and woke up in the middle of the night, with a song ringing in my head. They were the words of an old Motown song that went like this:

"Runaway child, you are running wild. You better go back home where you belong. You are lost in the great big city. There's not one familiar face, ain't it a pity? Runaway child you are running wild, you better go back home where you belong."

I don't know who the Lord wants to address this morning, but there is somebody here who is a runaway child. It may be the person that's next to you. It may be the one that's behind or in front of you. And God knows it could be me, and it might even be you, but who ever it is this morning, God is telling you that you better go back home where you belong.

Now, our scripture today is a familiar one. In fact, we all know it as the parable about the prodigal or runaway son. And because it is so familiar, we naturally assume that this is a message for the unsaved or the backsliders only. But I want to suggest to you that this message can equally apply to those of us who are practicing Christians today.

For the truth of the matter is that we all, at times, allow or have allowed ourselves to cross over to the wild side, every now and then. We have left at sometime or another, left the comfort of home with God our father, Jesus our savior and the Holy Ghost as our keeper, just to experience the wild side. Can I get a witness?

- We've left from reading our bibles to reading trashy magazines, the wild side.
- We left from living for Christ to living for Satan, the wild side.
- We've traded mid-week service -for TV show reruns, the wild side
- We've decided to curse about it instead of pray about it, the wild side.
- We've chosen to be moved by our own wills, instead of the will of God, the wild side.
- We've chosen UN-godly lifestyles and practices that are not consistent with the word of God, the wild side.

- We spend up all that we have in service, all that we have in talents and all that we have money on things that have nothing to do with the kingdom of God, and then we give God the leftovers, as if he is a hobo, pauper, or vagrant who will just accept anything, And then we have the nerve to think God will answer our prayers as if he is a jack in the box, a magical Jeanie in the jar, or a cosmic bell hop, that's living on the wild side.

All of us have and some of us still are living on the wild side. And yet we have a father at home, who is saying to us, runaway child that's running wild, you better come back home where you belong. That's why Jesus told this parable of the prodigal son. To let you and me know that we should leave the wild side and come back home to God's care. Well, maybe somebody is saying how can we recognize a runaway child. Let me suggest to you a few ways.

Number One – A Runaway Child Often Sees Life as A Platitude

Now the Webster dictionary defines the word platitude as something that is insipid or boring. You see the reason why this young man wanted to leave home was for some excitement. He was tired of being under the authority and protection of his father. To him this was boring. He needed some excitement. He felt his life had leveled off, and that it had become a platitude. You know, the same old same old: Praising God in the morning, reading the scriptures in the evening, following the father instructions bit by bit.

He must have thought, what a boring life, I know that there is excitement out there. I've never been out in the world but I heard that out there its finger popping time. I heard that out there, you can let the good times roll. I heard that out there, that people are

being rocked at night for old time sake. I heard that out there, they are twisting the night away.

I've heard that the women are just right for the picking. I've never had the opportunity, but I heard that when the party gets just right, everybody gets as drunk as a skunk. I heard that out there people don't have a care in the world. I heard that out there you can be what you want to be, and that you don't have responsibilities. I heard that out there you are a million miles from reality. I heard that out there, there's only bump and grind, and drinking wine and that all the people live on cloud nine. So he must have thought I've got to leave this boring place so that I can experience the out there!

But let me warn you there is danger in leaving the place that God has set up for you to be trained, nurtured, developed and protected. The grass always look greener on the other side until you find out, that the grass you thought was greener was simply artificial turf.

Wonder if anybody here can say I've been there and done that, and found out that it was not real. The thrill was not real. The appeal had no zeal. For it was only Satan's deception to steal and to kill the joy that God had for me.

I don't know how you feel about it, but the safest and the happiest place to be in the whole wide world is in the arms and in the house of God. It's not a boring place, but it is the safest place. It's not a boring place but it is a hiding place. It's not a boring place but it is a healing place

Number Two – A Runaway Child Fails To Show Gratitude

Let's look at this child, he's bored and wants to leave so he asked his father, for an inheritance, that he has not earned, and after he receives it, there is no place in this parable that Jesus tells, that demonstrates his thanks to his father. I mean the father had raised

him. The father had fed him. The father had clothed him. The father had protected him. The father provided him with everything he needed and most of the thing he wanted. But never in the text do we hear him say thanks to the father.

That's a sure enough sign of a child of God who's running wild. They fail to see that they have not gotten this far by themselves. The reason why they are bored with the comfortable life style is because somebody else has provided for them. And that's how it is with us sometimes. We get tired of serving God and being in the fold, because we have become comfortable and at ease in Zion. When we did not have anything we use to say even thought there is no fruit on the vine, no beans in the stall, or chickens in the coup, Lord I thank you for the little bit that I have. But once God has raised us up and allowed us to get some things of high value, we have become spoiled. We want more and more, but thank him less and less. Because we fail to be grateful for how God has kept us from the earliest time of our existence to this present time. Somebody ought to say thank you. Lord if you don't give me anything else, thank you. You've given me enough already thank you!

Number Three – A Runaway Child has A Careless and Reckless Attitude

Look at this young man again. He's bored and ungrateful and to top that off he's careless. He takes the money that his father has given him and splurges it. He ends up wasting it on riotous living. He spends what the father has given him on sinful things. The father has blessed it, but sinful living has cursed his blessing. And as a result, his platitude, non-gratitude and ungrateful attitude, has stifled his latitude.

It was the father's plan that he would be successful, not regretful. It was the father's plan that he would rise and not fall. But now here he is. We find him in a pigpen,

with hogs. Imagine it, a Jew, with hogs. Imagine it God's favored with hogs, all because he is a runaway child who has been running wild.

Brothers and sisters God desires that you be successful, but you've got to abide under his protection you've got to abide under his rules for if you do not, I declare you will find yourself, living lower than God ever expected you to live. Doing things that God has never expected you to do. All because you decided to be a runaway child that's running wild.

Last – For Every Runaway Child That's Running Wild

There Is An Anyway Father That Loves His Child

Note that the son had lost his money. The son had lived in sin. The son was dirty and filthy. The son was hungry. And the son had done something that could have dismissed him as a Jew, and labeled him as a pagan dog. But in spite of it he said I'm going back to my father because even his servants live better than this.

You see the son had learned something through this whole ordeal. He learned that while he was with his father, he was protected, but while he was away from him he was unprotected from the enemy. His attitude also changed for he says I've sinned, so I'll go back to my father as servant instead of son. Not realizing that once you are a son, you are always a son.

My brothers and sisters, that's what we must do. We must go back to God as servants, even though we know that we are his children. For God recognizes an act of repentance when he sees it.

And that's good news. For we serve a God that told Israel that you can come back to me, for I am married to you. We serve a God who has stated in his word, that if you confess with your mouth and believe in your heart, you shall be saved. We serve a God that says come unto me; all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

The runaway child who had been running wild made up his mind to go back to his father. Yes he was a runaway child who had been running wild, but the good part of the story is that he had a father who loved his child. The boy had been ungrateful, but his father said I love and want you back anyway. The boy was dirty, but his father said I'll take you back anyway.

That's just like our God, he "take you back anyway." You may not deserve it, but he will take you back anyway. Can I get a witness? Anybody here remember when you were a runaway child, who was running wild? How many of you know that no matter where you've been, how long you've been there and what you've done that God will take you back.

Oh can I get a witness. I once was lost in sin, but Jesus took me in and just ...I've wondered far away from home

Go and Do Likewise
By Marvin L. Miller, Sr.

Scripture: Luke 10:25-34

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' " "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.

Subject: Go and Do Likewise

This weekend we are pausing to celebrate, Memorial Day, a day when we remember the sacrifices that have been made for us by those who have served in the arm forces as well as the sacrifices that have been made by friends and loved ones who have passed on.

Memorial Day is a good day for us to remember that we were placed on this earth to show the love of Christ and to sacrifice and render services to others. For our Lord, in his own words tells us that if anyone would be great let him or her be a servant.

- Note that he did not say, that one must be the boss with the hot sauce, but He says they must serve
- He does not say that you must have the highest educational, degrees, although education is fine, but He says you must serve
- He does not say that you must earn a 6-figure salary and own a Luxurious home, and a fancy car, but He says you must serve.

Jesus makes it plain. As far as greatness is concerned in reference to Christianity, the one who is servant, the one who ministers to others unselfishly, the ones who ministers to others with the same love and compassion that Jesus has demonstrated to the world, they are considered to be Great in the Kingdom of heaven.

Here in our text, lord tells a parable, a story concerning, what it takes to be a good neighbor, with the moral of the story being to be a good neighbor, it takes being a good servant. The story came about after a Jewish expert in the law asked Jesus, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Now, the question in this case was not sincere, as can be seen twice in the text. First the lawyer wanted to test Jesus, that’s why he called him Rabbi, meaning teacher. Then second, after Jesus answered the man’s question, Luke records that the man wished to justify himself (Luke 10:29). In other words he already had some that he considered not being his neighbors. In other words, he had already decided that there was some beneath him that were not worthy of his help, or respect. So he began to justify himself.

Haven’t you ever seen people who know that hating is wrong, but they try to justify their hate? Haven’t you seen people that know that they should help out but make excuses why they can’t? Haven’t you ever seen and heard people make excuses why they aren’t serving God, why they won’t study His word, why they won’t show up for bible study, Sunday school, and why they can’t give their time, tithes and talents for the up building of God’s kingdom. They try to justify themselves.

So, Jesus understands where the man is going with the conversation, and tells him a parable so that he could get his theology straight. He tells the story of a man who had been robbed and beaten and left on the road. As he lay there, three men came by. Two of the men a priest (pastor) who was over the temple, and a Levite, who was the equivalent of a

associate minister saw that the man needed help and passed over to the other side refusing to help.

Now we are not sure why these two men passed by. Some say that they were afraid that the robbers were still near by, as this road was notorious for people to get robbed and killed. Others say that they were on their way to the Temple and in a hurry to get to worship service. But I take issue with that, because the text said that they were going down from, not going up to Jerusalem.

And even if they were going to worship, the best way that they could have worshiped was to help this fallen man. Then other's say that the priest and the Levite did not help the man because he appeared to be dying, and, as a result by Law, they would have been ceremonially unclean if they helped him. But whatever the reason they had Jesus refused to identify them as good neighbors.

But then there was a third man. A man who was considered to be a half-breed to the Jews. A man who was considered as low life. A man who the Jews despised. One who the Jews often called pagan and dog. Of all the people in the world, this man, this Samaritan, paused to help the dying man on the road.

And let me say this, beware that you don't pump men and women up because of their so-called status in life, because everybody who dresses the role, don't act the role. Everybody who seems to be cool ain't cool, everybody that seems to have your interest at heart is not for you. And even at church you better beware, because there are folk who will bless you on Sunday, and curse you on Monday. There are folk who will pray with you on Tuesday and Prey on you on Wednesday.

There are folk, who you can talk too on Thursday, but they'll talk about you on Friday. Don't you be fooled by looks and status, there are times when you expect help

from those that seem to have it together and find out that the ones that have the least, will share with you the most.

But thank God that Jesus tells us that this Samaritan was a good servant, and that He tells us to God and Do Likewise. Well, in order for us to emulate the Samaritan Servant what is it that we must do? Let's look at six things the text tells us we must do:

- Number One (Vs. 33) – We Must Be Willing To Stop For Others
- Number Two (Vs. 34) – We Must Be Willing to Stoop For Others
- Number Three (Vs. 34)- We Must Be Willing to Saddle (pick up) Others*
- Number Four (s., 35) We Must Be Willing To Spend On Others*
- Number Five (Vs. 35) We Must Be Willing To Stay With Others*
- Number Six (Vs. 36) We Must Be Willing To Sacrifice For Others*

Closing

And the reason why we must do these six things is because when we were lost in sin, after -Satan had robbed us of eternal life, Satan beaten us down with sin.

But I'm glad that we have our own Good Samaritan, His name is Jesus, the righteous Son of God. The Lilly of the valley the bright and Morning Star! Let me tell you what Jesus did for us.

- Didn't Jesus, stop by to see about us. He came all the way through 42 generations just to stop by and save us from our sins.
- Then not only did he stop, but Jesus stooped down. Yes I was as low as you could go. But he stooped down and picked us up from alcohol, pieced us up from drugs, picked us up from sin. Can I get a witness that he will pick you up and turn you around?
- But he didn't only stop and stoop, but I declare that he saddled me. He picked me up and turned me around, I have heard the joyful sound... He will pick you up and turn you around.
- Then Jesus spent for me; he stayed with me and sacrificed for me. One day on a hill called Calvary, he spent all that he had and gave his life as a perfect sacrifice. He hung from the sixth to the ninth hour. He was laid in a borrowed tomb. But on Sunday Morning he got up with all power in his hands.
- But that's not the end of the story; before he left, he promised every Christian that he would always stay with them. For I heard him say: "Lo, I'll be with you even until the end of the earth." And His sacrifice brought

us from sickness to health. His sacrifice brought us from poverty to wealth. His sacrifice picked us up and turned us around. His sacrifice placed our feet on solid ground.

And since Jesus has done this for you, if you are His servant you ought to go and do likewise.

The Lord Is Looking For Help
By Marvin L. Miller, Sr.

Scripture: Matthew 9:35-38

“35 And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. 36 But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd. 37 Then saith he unto his disciples, the harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. 38 Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.”

Subject: Jesus Is Looking For Help

If one were to read Chapter 9 of Matthew without reading our text today first, it would be hard to believe that our Lord and Savior would ever need help with anything, from any body, at any time or in any situation. For this chapter is filled with illustrations of Jesus' omnipotent, power and authority. Just look at what's recorded in it and you would never believe that Jesus needs help.

- In verse 2 He heals a man who had palsy, by saying thy sins be forgiven thee
- In verse 9 he simply passed by Matthew and said follow me and Matthew arose and left everything he had to go with Jesus.
- In verse 20 a woman with an issue of blood touched the hem of His garment and was made whole.
- In verse 25 he took the hand of a certain ruler's daughter who was dead and in the midst of the Homegoing service that was in progress the maid arose from her deathbed.
- In verses 29-34, our Lord made the blind to see and the dumb to talk simply by overpowering and casting out demonic spirits.

That's why it seems illogical that our Lord and Savior would need our any of our help. But as crazy as it may seem, I want you to know that he certainly does. For here in the text, Jesus declares after all the great things he had done, “The harvest is plenteous but the laborers are few. Pray that the Lord will send help for the harvest.”

And this morning let's analyze and reflect on how we can help Jesus with His harvest.

First – To Help Jesus We Must See What Jesus Saw

Notice that Jesus saw the crowd, the multitude as the potential harvest. Yes he knew that some were weak, some were crippled, some were lost like a sheep without a shepherd, but he never counts any of them out. In fact Jesus looked beyond where there were and saw where they could be. He looked beyond their negatives and saw the positive potential. He looked beyond their present problems and accessed their future potentials. Even though no one else considered them to be any good, Jesus looked over their present condition, to their future use for the kingdom and referred to them as the harvest for they were ready to receive His ministry.

I wonder if anybody here sees what Jesus sees in the people who are lost in the world. Do you see the sinner as good for nothing or potentially good for something? Do you see the crowd as Jesus saw the crowd? Do you see them as deserving or undeserving? Do you see them as worthy or unworthy? That's an important question, because in order for you and I to help Jesus, we must see the crowd and see the world as Jesus saw them.

You see God never gives up on us for where we are, because He knows where we are going. Even when the world looked lost and the devil thought that it was cursed to damnation, the bible says that God saw potential. For potential is simply the difference in what is and what can be. In other words God saw that we were sinners, but He knew that we could be saints, and as a result, He gave all He had for to make our potential become a reality. That's why the bible says "that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but they shall have

everlasting life. That's how God saw the world and that's why Jesus saw the crowd as a harvest, because they all had a potential to turn their lives around.

And I declare that somebody in here ought to thank God for that. Because somebody saw you down and believed you would never get up. Somebody saw you crippled and believed that you would never walk. Somebody saw you broke and believed you would always have financial difficulties. Somebody saw you lost and thought you would never be found. Someone heard you curse and thought you would never speak holy. Someone thought you were down and thought you would never come around.

But aren't you glad that God saw potential in you and that by his grace and tender the mercies can sing:

"I shall forever lift my eyes to Calvary, to view the Cross where Jesus died for me how marvelous, His grace has caught my falling soul. For the Lord saw potential in me, and looked beyond my faults and saw my needs."

Well, there are others out in the field who are just waiting to meet the standard and potential that God has for them also. Some young boy or girl; some man or woman; some sinner or backslider; somebody who needs to recognize that, with Jesus, they have great potential. And in order for us to help Jesus we must see them as Jesus saw them as the harvest of God.

Second – To Help Jesus We Must Recognize What Jesus Recognized

Well, what did Jesus recognize? He saw the harvest, but he recognized that there was a labor shortage. Then he declared that the harvest is right but the laborers are few. I mean there is a great field to of which to pick, and pluck, but there are no pickers or pluckers for the harvest. In other words there are not enough people who are in the

kingdom that will work. There are plenty that will watch. There are plenty that will criticize. There are plenty that will scandalize, but there aren't many that will actualize their time, talent, money and gifts to work the harvest. There is simply a labor shortage. Just think about it, when it comes to working for God's Kingdom how many of us come up short? Isn't it interesting that:

Praise is high but labor is short
 Singing is high but labor is short
 Programs are high but labor is short
 Lip praise is high but work praise is short
 Loving words are high, but love through work and action is short.

There is a field that's ripe for the picking. Somebody who's waiting to hear the word of God. Someone who's looking for the church to move with compassion, just like Jesus. Somebody who does not mind sacrificing for the sake of the master. Jesus says, I want you to recognize that the harvest is ready, but there are very few workers, because there is a labor shortage. —

And we know that is true even in our churches throughout the land.

- When 20% of a local church does 100% of the work; there is a labor shortage. —
- When most Christians believe that their only obligation to God is to come to church on happy hour on Sunday Morning.
- When our children need someone to educate them, lead them and show them the way, and yet it's hard to get anyone to minister to them with enthusiasm and joy.
- When only a small portion of members visits and helps the sick, the lonely, the shut-ins, and those who are in prison.
- When very few of us evangelize to our relatives, friends, neighbors and work associates during the week.
- When we spend more money on foolishness than we do on things to up build God's kingdom.

I've come to tell you that Jesus was right, the harvest is right but the laborers are few because there is a labor shortage! But this ought not to be my brothers and sisters for it should be every Christian's desire that God will call them home from labor to reward. Not from setting to reward, not from getting to reward, not from complaining to reward, but from labor to reward.

I don't know about you but I want my Lord to say well done though good and faithful servant. All because I responded to His labor shortage situation.

Number 3 – To Help Jesus We Must Pray What Jesus Said To Pray

Notice that after Jesus saw the harvest and after He recognized that there was a labor shortage, he told his disciples to pray that God would send laborers for the harvest. Well Jesus, why should we pray, can't we just accept any old body to work in the field. I mean Sally does not really want to usher but if you prod her she will. Jeff doesn't really want to lead songs but if you beg him he will. Susie does not really want to evangelize but while someone is looking she will. Church members don't really want to sacrifice but if you plead with them they will. Ministries don't really have your work on their minds but if you remind them they will.

But I can hear Jesus say, oh no that won't do. You should pray that God will send somebody that say not my will Lord but thine be done. You should pray that God will send somebody, who says I'm yours Lord everything I am, everything I'm not and everything I've got, I'm yours Lord try me and see if I can be completely yours.

Not just any old workers can do, but only those who are sold out to Jesus. Jesus wants us to pray for workers who will go, no matter what the cost. Workers who will work despite their shortcomings and difficulties.

Pray that hard headed folk like Jonah will make it up in their minds to preach at Nineveh.

Pray that people who made mistakes like David, will say create in me a clean heart and renew in me a right spirit.

Pray that hot heads like lying Peter, will meet Jesus on their roads to Damascus and start working in the vineyard for Jesus.

Pray, that folk will not allow their shortcomings and handicaps keep them from working for God. But like Moses, who had a stuttering problem, they will meet Pharaoh face to face and say, Pha, Pha, Pha, ro, ro, ro, God said let my people go

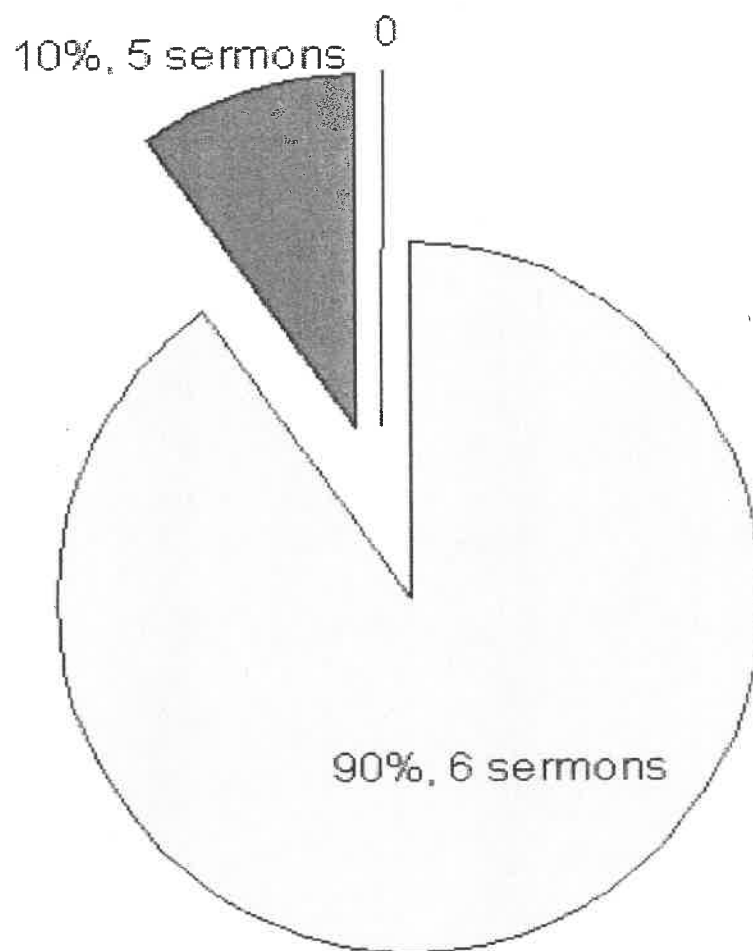
And finally pray that your own heart will yield to God and that you will answer, as Isaiah did, when he heard 'God said who will go and who shall I send, Pray that you will be able to say Lord send me. After all you've done for me. Send me. After saving my soul, let me be your helper. After making me whole place me in the field. I will go where you want me to go and I will do what you want me to do. If you need my help, here am I, Lord, send me.

(Take my life and let it be)

APPENDIX E
SERMON SERIES QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

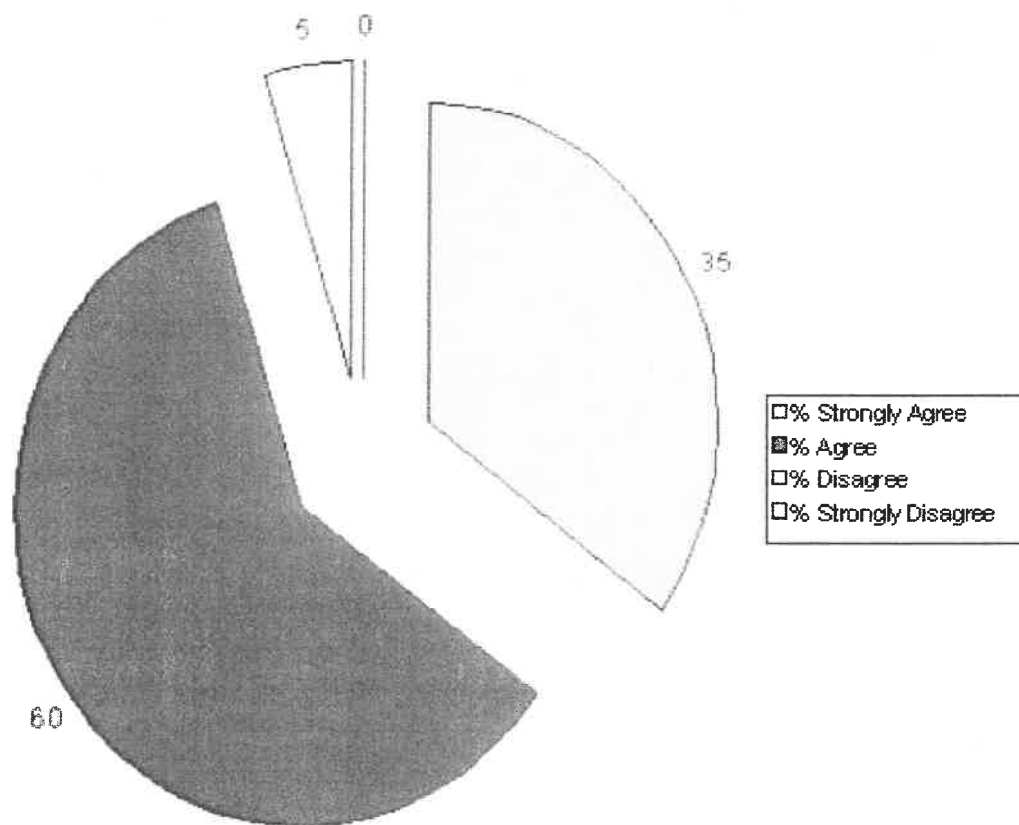
1. The number of sermons I have heard of the preaching series
(a) 6 sermons (b) 5 sermons (c) 4 sermons (d) 3 sermons
(e) 1-2 sermons

Sermon Series - Question 1



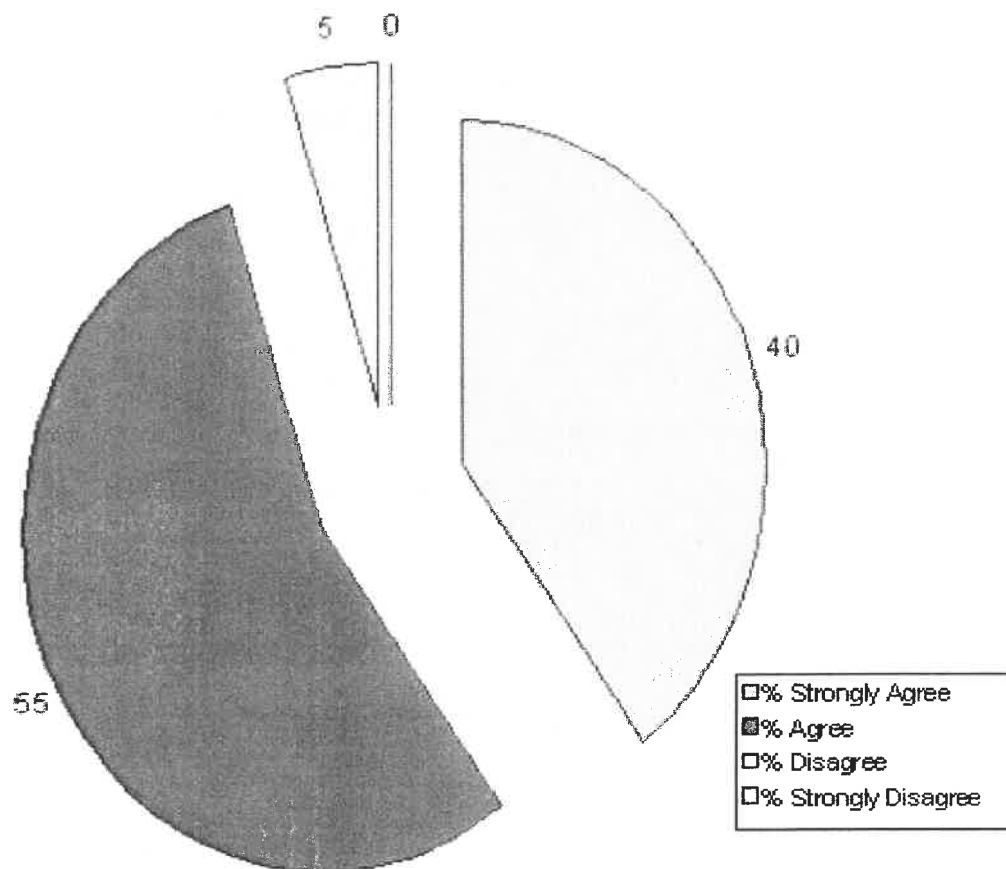
2. The preaching series has made me more aware of the importance of a Christian's responsibility to watch over and care for one another.

Sermon Series Questionnaire - Question 2



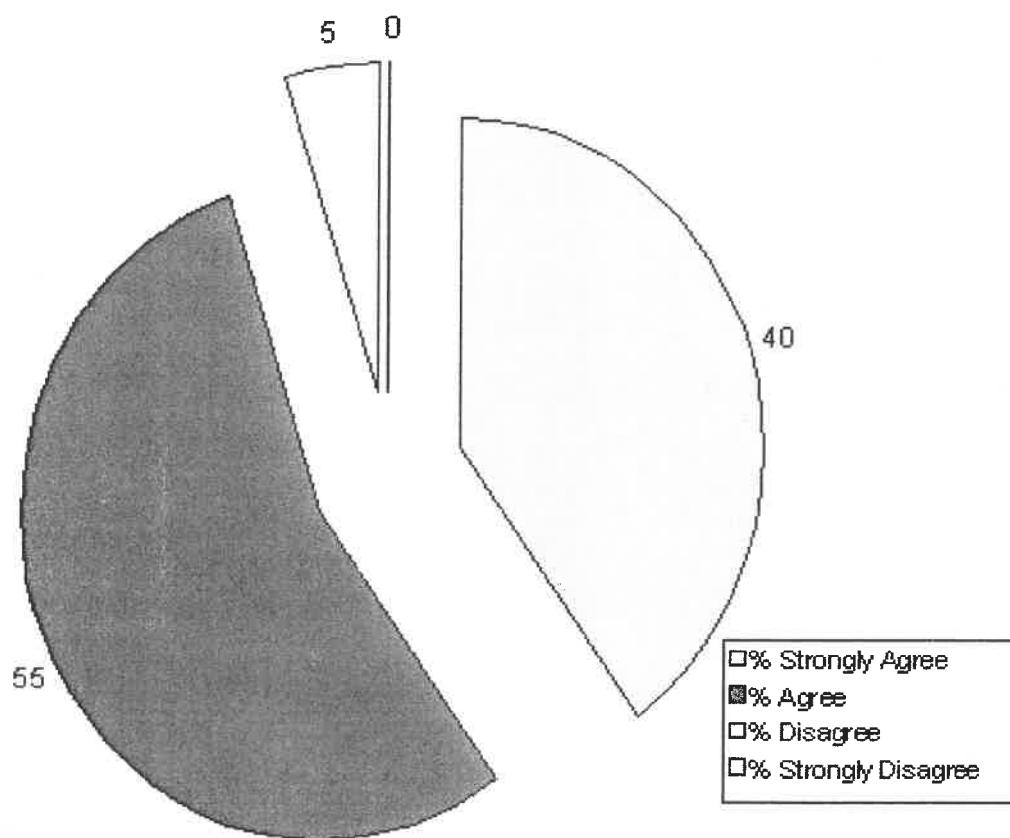
3. Preaching has broadened my awareness concerning the "Swinging Door Problem" that exists within churches.

Sermon Series Questionnaire - Question 3



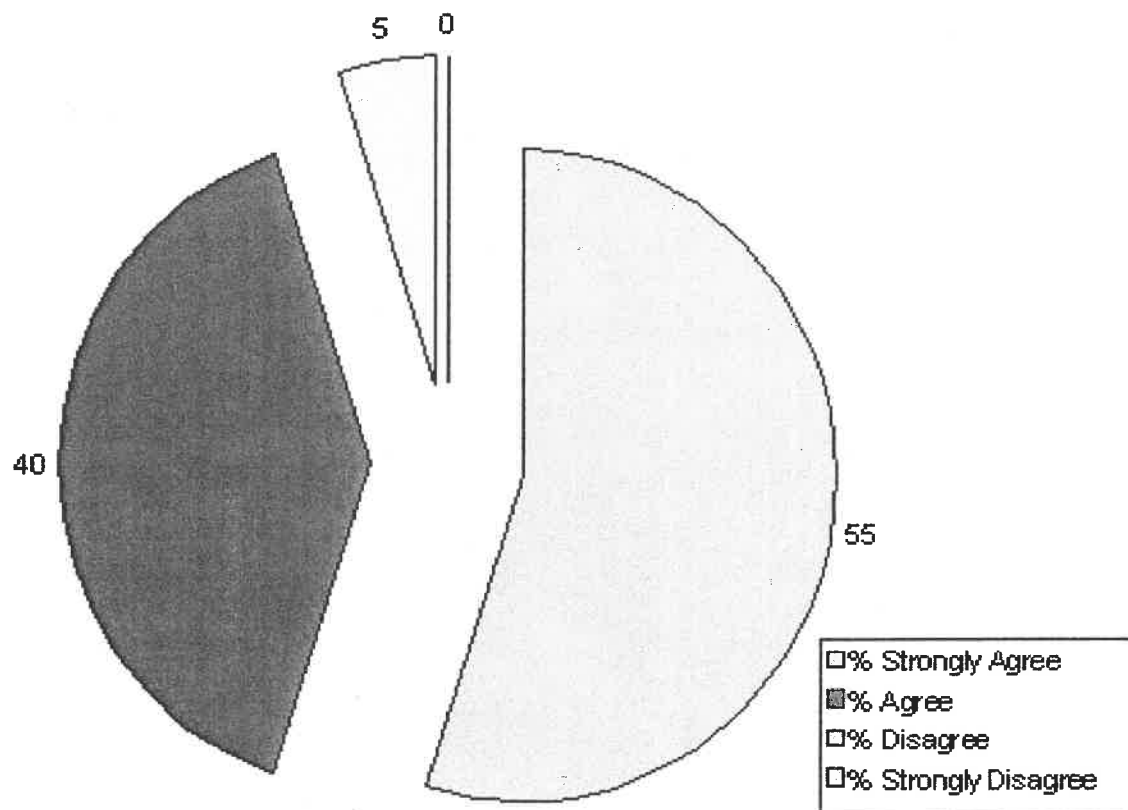
4. The messages that have been preached concerning "Let's Keep the Sheep" have convinced me that the body of Christ needs to do more to reach out to wayward, straying, and lost members.

Sermon Series Questionnaire - Question 4



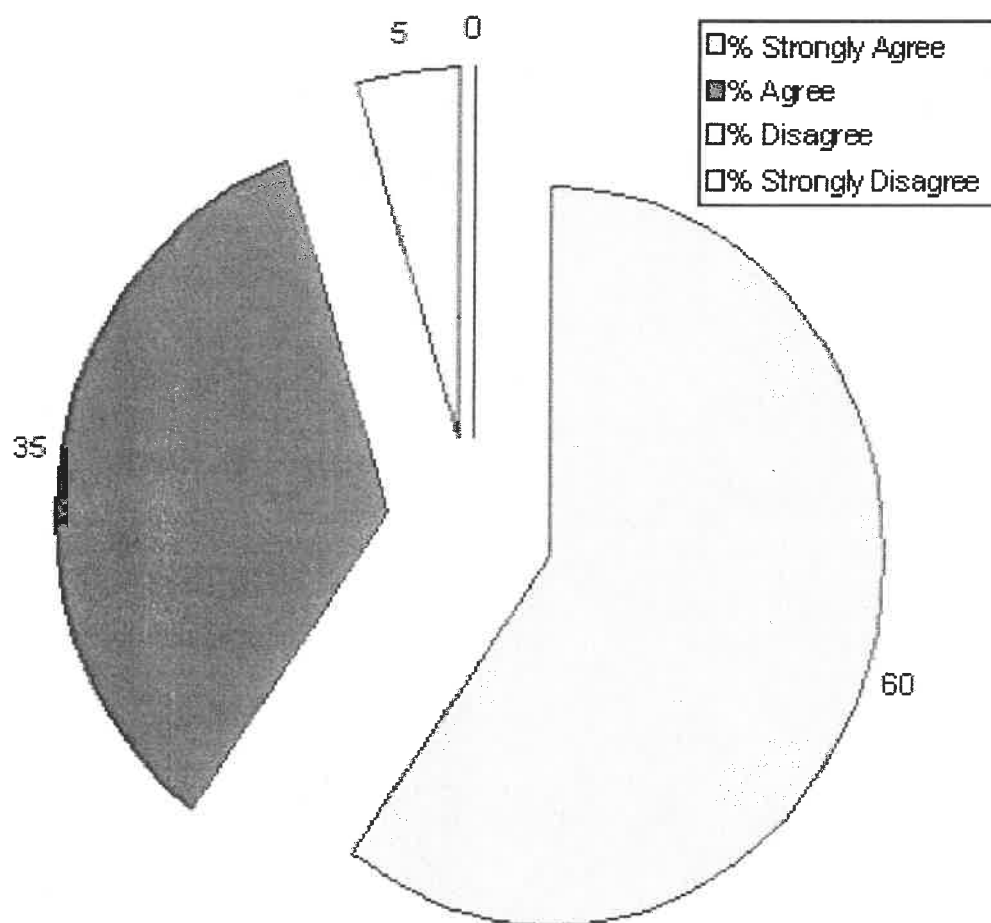
5. The sermon series has caused me to understand core concerns and value of every member of the body of Christ.

Sermon Series Questionnaire - Question 5



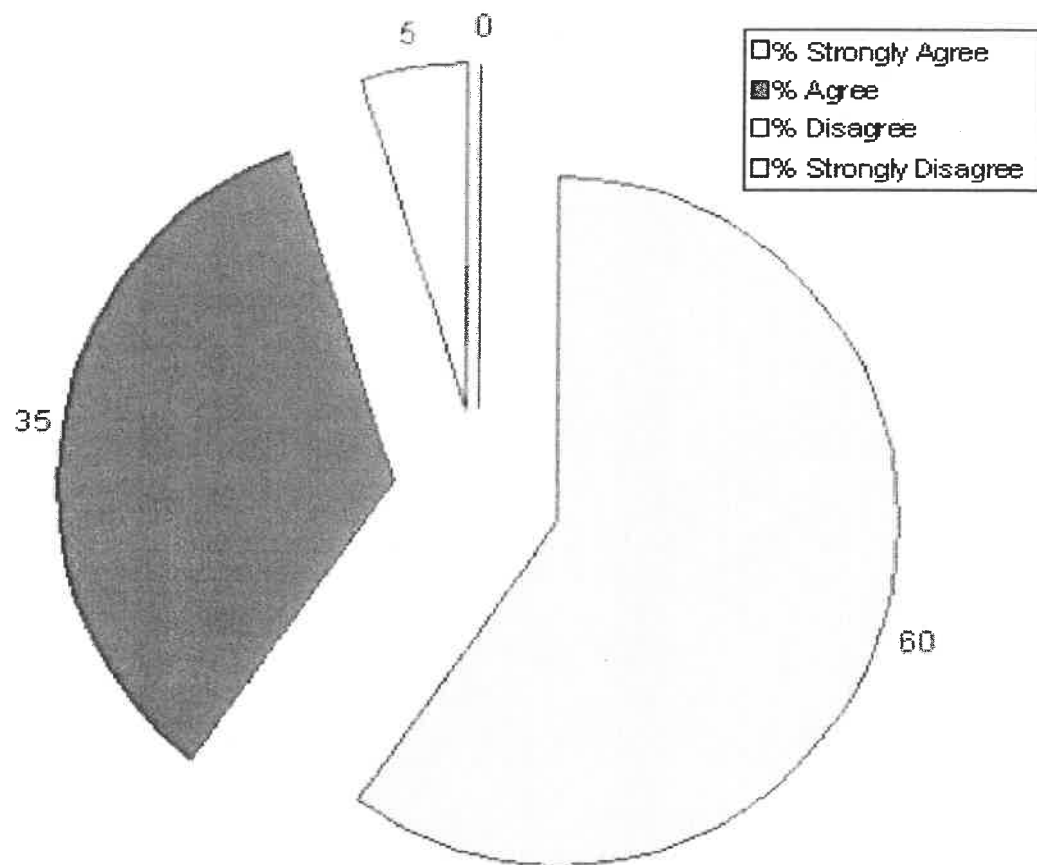
6. The sermons have enhanced my understanding of the biblical relationship between members who are in the body of Christ.

Sermon Series Questionnaire - Question 6



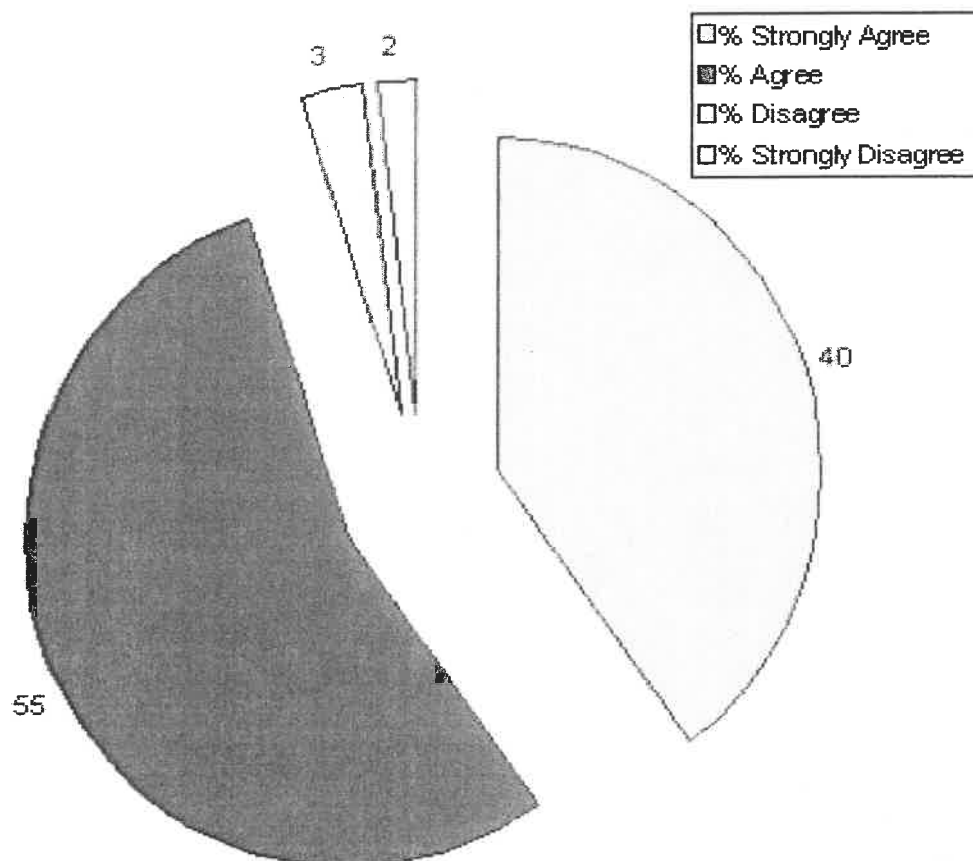
7. The sermon series have addressed issues of unity and togetherness that should be embraced by all who are of the body of Christ.

Sermon Series Questionnaire - Question 7



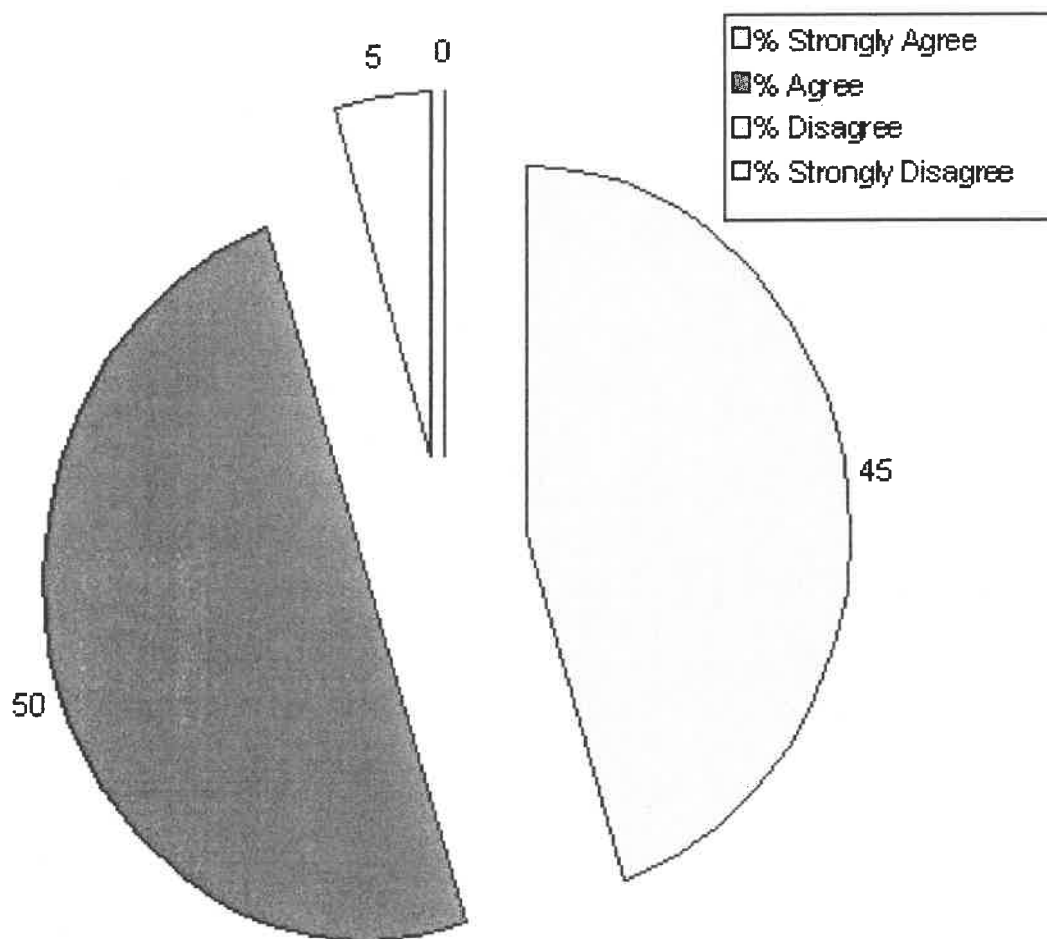
8. The sermon series has caused me to become more caring about my Christian brothers and sisters in our church.

Sermon Series Questionnaire - Question 8



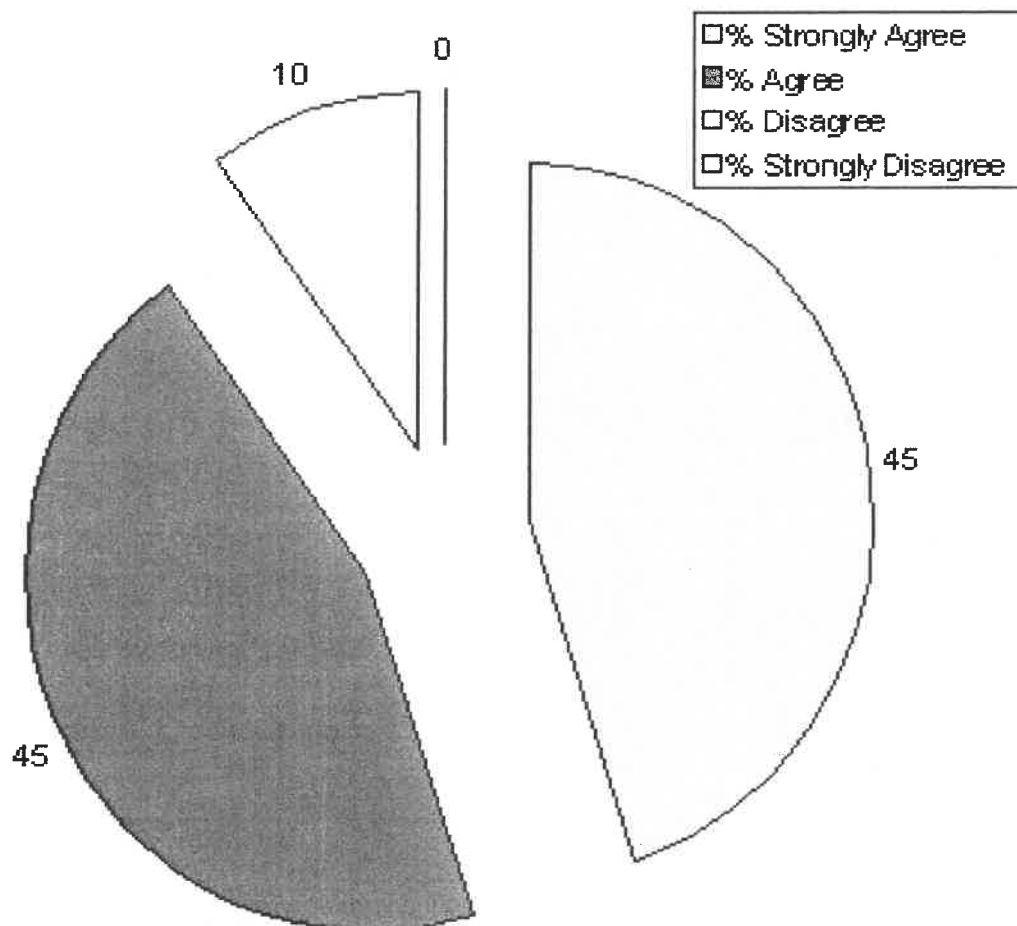
9. The sermon series has moved me from being little concerned to very concerned about the "Swinging Door Problem."

Sermon Questionnaire - Question 9



10. The sermon series has motivated me to become involved in witnessing and assisting those who have strayed or left the church.

Sermon Series Questionnaire - Question 10



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ammerman, Nancy T., and Jackson W. Carrrol. *Studying Congregations*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998.
- Balchin, John. *The Compact Survey of The Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1987.
- Bandy Thomas. *Christian Chaos, Revolutionizing The Congregation*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999.
- Barna Research Group. *Church Growth – Where Are We Going – Data & Trends*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1997.
- Burns, Jabez. *Sermon Outline Series*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publishing Company, 1987.
- Crabtree, Russell J. *Church Planning Questionnaire*. Columbus, OH: Holy Cow! Consulting, 2003.
- Cranton, Patricia. *Professional Development as Transformative Learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey - Bass, 1996.
- Creswell, John W. *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1994.
- Easum, William. *Discovering Our Place in God's World*. Port Arkansas, TX: Easum-Bandy Associates, 1993.
- Edge, Finley B. *The Doctrine of the Laity*. Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1985.
- Ersline, Noel L. *King Among Theologians*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1994.
- Green, J.D. *Religion In the Age of Decline*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Haberlin, John. "A Response to Continued Membership Decline." Available at <http://www.pres-outlook.com/haberlin.html>; Internet.
- Hadaway, C. Kirk. *Church Growth Principles: Separating Fact from Fiction*. Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1991.

- Hadaway, C. Kirk. *What Can We Do About Church Dropouts?* Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1991.
- Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1927.
- Hanby, Mark. *The House That God Built*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Publications, 1993.
- Harre, Alan F. *Close The Back Door*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1984.
- Haugh, Kenneth. *Christian Caregiving*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 1998.
- Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1975.
- Hunt, Allen R. *The Inspired Body*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996.
- Kemmis, Stephen, and Robin McTaggart. *The Action Research Planner*. Victoria, Australia: Deakin University Press, 1998.
- Macchia, Stephen A. *Becoming A Healthy Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999.
- McIntosh, Gary, and Glen Martin. *Finding Them, Keeping Them: Effective Strategies for Evangelism and Assimilation in the Local Church*. Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992.
- McNiff, Jean, Pamela Lomax and Jack Whitehead. *You and Your Action Research Project*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Myers, William R. *Research in Ministry*. Chicago, IL: Exploration Press, 1993.
- Nelson, Gustav. "Closing the Back Door of the Church." Available at <http://www.pres-outlook.com/haberlin.html>; Internet.
- Nelson, Ellis C. *Congregations: Their Power To Form And Transform*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.
- Noel, Leo Erskine. *King Among the Theologians*. Philadelphia, PA: The Pilgrim Press, 1994.
- Oswald, Roy and Robert Friedrich, *Discerning Your Congregation's Future*. New York: Alban Institute, 1996.
- Owen C. *Introduction to Theology*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1983.
- Pleins, J. David. *The Social Vision of the Hebrew Bible, A Theological Introduction*. Louisville, KY: Westminster, John Knox Press, 2001.

- Proctor, Samuel. *The Substance of Things Hoped For*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons 1996.
- Pohly, Kenneth. *Transforming the Rough Places*. Dayton, OH: Whaleprints, 1993.
- Rainer, Thom S. *The Book of Church Growth: History Theology and Principles*. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1993.
- Richards, Lawrence. *Illustrated Bible Handbook*. Nashville, TN: W. Publishing Group, 1997.
- Roozen, David A., and Kirk C. Hadaway. *Church and Denominational Growth: What Does (or does not) Cause Growth or Decline*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993.
- Roxburg, Alan. *Crossing the Bridge, Church Leadership In A Time of Change*. Rancho Santa Margarita, CA: Percept Group, 2000.
- Russell, Keith. "How Ministry Shapes The Church," Sermon at New York Theological Seminary.
- Sahlin, Monte. "An Affluent Outreach," *Adventist Review*. Available at <http://www.AdventistReview.org>; Internet; Accessed 2002.
- Schaller, Lyle E., *Assimilating New Members*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1978.
- Spike, Robert W. *In But Not of the World, A Notebook of Theology and Practice in the Local Church*. New York: Association Press, .
- Stewart, David. "100% Convert Retention Action Guide"; Available at <http://www.cumorah.com/retention.htm>; Internet.
- Study on Membership Decline*. Nashville TN: United Methodist News Service, (Release #667).
- Theissen, Gerd and Annette Merz. *The Historical Jesus*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1988.
- Tiffany, Fred C. and Sharon Ringe. *Biblical Interpretation: A Road Map*. Nashville. TN: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995.
- Webster, Merriam A, *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, Springfield, MA: G. C. Merriam Company, 1977.
- Wells, Ronald. *History and The Christian Historian*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1998.

Wingfield, Mark. *Biblical Recorder*, 1998; Available at <http://www.org/opinion>; Internet; accessed on August 30, 2002.

Woods, Jeff C. *Congregational Mega*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1996.

Yeakley, Flavil R. "Growth and Assimilation." *Church Growth: America* 7 (March-April, 1981): 17-18.